THE PROBLEM OF BLASPHEMY

THE FOURTH GOSPEL AND EARLY JEWISH UNDERSTANDINGS

JERRY DUANE TRUEX

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UNIVERSITY OF DURHAM

DEPARTMENT OF THEOLOGY

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To my wife

VANGIE RUTH TRUEX

who supported and encouraged me throughout the writing of this thesis, and

to our daughter

KARISSA RUTH TRUEX

who provided joy and help in her own special way

To my parents

JOSEPH WILLIAM TRUEX

(11 November 1926 —)

and

MARGARET GATES TRUEX

(14 April 1927 — 13 June 2000)

ABSTRACT

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Jerry Truex

This thesis argues that the Johannine Jewish Christians—those who produced, preserved, and propagated the Fourth Gospel—were perceived to be blasphemers of God because of their exalted claims for Jesus and their disparaging remarks against the Ἰουδαῖοι. It was probably on this basis that Jewish Christians were excommunicated from the synagogue (cf. Jn 9:22; 12:42; 16:2). We take three steps to establish this claim.

First, we review J. Louis Martyn's hypothesis that the Johannine Christians were expelled from the synagogue as a result of the *Birkat ha-Minim.* We argue that the *Birkat ha-Minim* is problematic, suggest that an alternative hypothesis is necessary, and propose that accusations of blasphemy would provide an alternative explanation. Next, we survey recent research on blasphemy, offer an analysis of the historical, social, and literary context of the Fourth Gospel, and present a semantic analysis of βλασφημέω and related terms.

Second, we probe seven Jewish traditions pertaining to blasphemy. We examine the prohibitions against cursing God (Exod 22:27[28]), "naming the name" (Lev 24:10-24), and sinning with a high hand (Num 15:30-31). Then, we track some of the most notorious blasphemers, including Sennacherib (2 Kgs 18:1—19:37), Antiochus (1 Macc 1:20—2:14), Nicanor (2 Macc 14:16—15:37), and an unnamed Egyptian ruler (*Somn* 2.123-132).

Third, we examine three Johannine claims—that *Jesus is equal with God*, that *Jesus is the New Temple*, and that *the Ἰουδαῖοι are of the Devil*—and argue that non-believing Jews would have regarded these claims as blasphemous and would have expelled anyone from the synagogue who proclaimed them.

CONTENTS

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PREFACE

The charge of blasphemy reveals "what a society will not and cannot tolerate. Blasphemy is a litmus test of the standards a society believes it must enforce to preserve its unity, its peace, its morality, its feelings, and the road to salvation."[1] This thesis addresses the issue of blasphemy in early Judaism, particularly as it pertains to the Fourth Gospel. It bears witness to a bitter struggle between two rival groups within the ancient Jewish world. One faction embraced Jesus as the Messiah and the other, a larger parent-group, became part of emergent Judaism. If the findings in this thesis are correct, their struggle for self-identity and religious truth led to the accusation of blasphemy, which became a tool to label and expel Jewish members who claimed that Jesus had divine authority and honor. With great sympathy and respect for both groups, I undertook the research and writing of this thesis in hopes of understanding the theological and social factors that were at stake for them. Understanding that rift long ago may provide healing for Jews and Christians today.

Throughout the thesis, certain conventions have been adopted. First, I have followed the abbreviations recommended by *The SBL Handbook of Style*.[2] Second, with the exception of the Acknowledgements and Preface, I have used the first person plural pronoun "we" or "our" to express my position. This convention seemed less pretentious than using "I" or "my" and less cumbersome than using the passive tense. Third, I have attempted to use inclusive language throughout the thesis. However, to avoid ambiguity and redundancy, I have occasionally used the third person masculine pronoun for deity. Fourth, the term *the Jews* (in italics) will refer to the literary construct depicted within the narrative of the Fourth Gospel, whereas the term without italics will have historical reference.

Jerry D. Truex
1 May 2001

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[1] Levy (1993) xi.
[2] *The SBL Handbook of Style* (1999).

PART I

BLASPHEMY AND THE FOURTH GOSPEL

In Part I, we propose the need to examine whether non-believing Jews during the late first-century would have regarded the theology of the Fourth Gospel (hereafter FG) as blasphemous. If demonstrated, it would suggest that the Johannine Jewish Christians—those who produced, preserved, and propagated the FG—would have been considered blasphemous and would account for their expulsion from the synagogue (chapter 1).

Next, we summarize and evaluate significant and representative research on blasphemy during the twentieth century, beginning with Strack-Billerbeck (1922-28) and ending with Darrell Bock (1998 and 2000) (chapter 2).

Then, we describe the probable historical, social, and literary contexts of FG. All three contexts point to conflict, a conflict that in all likelihood concerned who were the rightful heirs to Israel's inherence where the charge of blasphemy became a weapon of the disputing parties (chapter 3).

Lastly, we analyze the semantic relationships of five key terms—βλασφημέω, δυσφημέω, κακολογέω, καταλαλέω, and λοιδορέω—in order to provide a basic semantic map or orientation to our study of blasphemy (chapter 4).

CHAPTER 1
THE QUESTION OF BLASPHEMY

1.1 Introduction

The Fourth Gospel (FG)[1] witnesses to a bitter *intra-Jewish struggle* during the late first century that eventually led to a painful separation between the Johannine Jewish Christians[2] and non-believing Jews.[3] Something about the Johannine group, either their beliefs or behavior, precipitated a conflict that eventually led to their expulsion from the synagogue.[4] This rupture corresponds with certain Johannine claims within FG about Jesus, how God is *revealed through* him,[5] how sacred space is *relocated in* him,[6] and how sacred time—eternal life, Sabbath, Passover, Tabernacles, Dedication—is *reconfigured by* him.[7] Although Johannine claims about Jesus are expressed throughout the FG, the claims and the corresponding conflict become particularly intense in Jn 5:1 - 11:54, which has been viewed as an extended trial or conflict between Jesus and *the Jews*.[8] From the beginning to the end of this conflict

[1] FG will refer to the final form of the Fourth Gospel. We focus on the final form, not because analysis and spectulation regarding the pre-history of FG (its sources, redactive layers, and stages of development) are not important, but because the final form, and how it functioned (theologically and sociologically) for the earliest readers, is worthy in itself. It is reasonable to assume that the final form of FG emerged between 85-100 C.E., as supported by most contemporary scholarship.

[2] The terms *Johannine community*, *Johannine group*, and *Johannine Jewish Christians* will be used as overlapping synonyms, although the later term stresses the Jewish composition of the group as a reminder that the controversies of FG are family disputes among different Jewish factions. On the family dispute nature of FG, see Ashton (1991) 137ff. Furthermore, these terms will refer to Christians in the later first century who produced, preserved, and propagated FG, whose experiences either shaped the content of FG or were shaped by it, irrespective of whether they lived in the same local village or region. The exact Jewish-Gentile composition of the Johannine community is debated, though most scholars accept that it was predominantly Jewish in the beginning and became more Gentile as time passed. Still, it is remarkable that the controversies of FG are Jewish and opposition to Jesus (and the Johannine group) never concern the issue of Gentile inclusion.

[3] The term *the Jews* (in italics) will refer to the literary construct depicted within the FG, whereas the term without italics will have historical reference.

[4] Jn 9:22, 34; 12:42; 16:2; Martyn (1979) passim.

[5] Jn 1:18; 5:19-30; 14:7.

[6] Jn 1:51; 2:19-21; 4:24.

[7] Jn 5:17, 24; 6:4, 35; 7:2, 37-38; 8:12; 10:22.

[8] See Brown (1970 and 1979), Dodd (1963), Harvey (1976), Lincoln (1994 and 2000), and Robinson (1985). The observation seems to have originated with Dodd (1963) 88-92, who noted similarities between Mark's trial and Johannine parallels, which are spread throughout the FG. These similarities include: (1) the charge of threatening to destroy the temple (Mk 14:58; Jn 2:14-22), (2) the high priest's question, "Are you the Christ?" (Mk 14:61; Jn 10:24), (3) Jesus' prediction of the coming

section, amid claims and counter-claims, challenges and counter-challenges, Jesus is repeatedly charged with the most abhorrent of offensives—blasphemy against God.[9]

What is surprising is that little attention is paid to the emphasis FG places on blasphemy. Scholars who have addressed the issue of blasphemy have usually done so in conjunction with examining the historicity of Jesus' trial and so have focused on the Synoptic tradition rather than FG. Why the Johannine tradition is usually not consulted for historical reconstructions are multiple, not least of which is the assumption that FG reflects a time much later than the historical Jesus.[10]

However, this does not account for the lack of discussion among scholars about the significance of blasphemy for understanding FG itself. Perhaps the reason for this neglect is that the Johannine Jesus is explicitly accused of blasphemy in only Jn 10:34-36 where the terms βλασφημία and βλασφημέω each occur once. However, as will be argued in Chapter 4, the concept of blasphemy should not be reduced to or confused with a particular term. Blasphemy is a much broader concept than one or two terms can bear and, once this is recognized and a plausible concept has been articulated, then we maintain that the issue of blasphemy emerges at critical junctures of the Johannine narrative and plays a key factor in Jesus' conflicts with *the Jews*. The emergence of blasphemy throughout the series of conflicts between Jesus and *the Jews* is all the more significant because, as it is widely held, John's story of Jesus is simultaneously the story of the Johannine community.[11] This suggests that the conflicts that beset Jesus and the accusations that he endured also beset the Johannine Jewish believers, including the stigma of being labeled *blasphemers*. Surprisingly, only a few scholars have ever suggested that the Johannine Jewish Christians were

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Son of Man (Mk 14:52; Jn 5:27, 8:28), and (4) the charge of blasphemy against Jesus (Mk 14:64; Jn 10:33).

Brown (1970) 834 offers three basic explanations: (1) The Synoptics gathered charges against Jesus made during his ministry and used them to fill in the substance of the Sanhedrin session. (2) John "dispersed the contents of the Sanhedrin session so that Christians would understand that these charges against Jesus did not suddenly arise at the end of his ministry." (3) Charges made against Jesus throughout his ministry were repeated at the Sanhedrin session.

[9] Within the extended trial narrative, Jn 5:18, 7:28-30; 8:19; 8:59, and 10:33 (cf. 19:7) focus on the issue of blasphemy. In addition, the issue of blasphemy is raised during the high priest's questioning of Jesus in Jn 18:23 and it is probably alluded to in Jn 7:52. See Harvey (1976) 51-3, 58-9.

[10] Setzer (1994) 83-4.

[11] E.g., Martyn (1979) passim; Brown (1979) passim; Stibbe (1992) 50-66; however, see our qualifications of the *two-storied* reading of FG in the introduction to chapter 13.

accused of blasphemy,[12] but it has never been explored and never established. In fact, Jack Sanders argues that the christology of FG was not blasphemous.[13] Nevertheless, if it could be established, even circumstantially, that the Johannine community harbored beliefs that were considered blasphemous by non-believing Jews, it would help explain the parting of the ways between Jews and Christians as well as have significant repercussions for future readings of FG.

The aim of this thesis, therefore, is to establish that there is good evidence that the Johannine Jewish-Christians were considered blasphemous by non-believing Jews and this is sufficient to account for the expulsion of Jewish-Christians from the synagogue (Jn 9:22; 12:42; 16:2). If this thesis can be established, it would provide an alternative to the well-known, but controversial and problematic, proposal by J. Louis Martyn that the expulsion resulted from the use of the *Birkat ha-Minim* ("the blessing of the heretics").[14]

The remainder of this chapter will: (a) review Martyn's hypothesis, (b) interact with challenges to the *Birkat ha-Minim* hypothesis, (c) urge that the weakness of the *Birkat ha-Minim* explanation for the expulsion from the synagogue calls for an alternative, and (d) suggest that accusations of blasphemy against the Johannine group would provide such an alternative and therefore an investigation of blasphemy is warranted.

1.2 Martyn's Hypothesis

With good reason, Ashton has described Martyn's *History and Theology in the Fourth Gospel* as "probably the most important single work on the Gospel since

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[12] Brown (1979) 47 and Brown (1993) 544. Meeks (1990) 319; Minear (1993) 41-45, esp. 44, holds "Jews who took the name of Jesus shared the blasphemy of the false prophet whose execution had disproved any messianic pretension." E. P. Sanders (1990) 64 says that it is reasonable to assume that Christians were accused of blasphemy for their christological confessions.

[13] J. T. Sanders (1993) 93 writes, "Unreasonable as it may seem to us moderns, the 'high christology' of the Gospel of John may have been outlandish but probably was not blasphemous or heretical within Roman-period Judaism, since similar notions [i.e., about the divine status attributed to Jesus] could exist elsewhere within the Judaism of that time."

[14] Martyn (1979) 54-62. In contrast, Brown (1979) 43-47 argues that the development of a higher Christology by certain Jewish-Christians caused their expulsion from the synagogue. It is difficult to establish whether Christological developments provoked the expulsion or vice versa. The factors were probably multiple.

Bultmann's commentary."[15] Similarly, Rensberger writes that Martyn's hypothesis "furnishes us with a definite social framework and polemic context within which John's highly developed theology could have taken shape, and it permits us to ask further questions about the social, as well as the theological, implications of Johannine thought."[16]

Martyn believes that the socio-historical setting of FG corresponds to the post 70 CE period in which the rabbis at Yavneh were "closing the ranks" by becoming increasingly intolerant of certain elements that diverged from their vision of Judaism. FG was not only produced in that environment, but it was written in reaction to policies that were emerging from Yavneh which, it appears, precipitated a major crisis for the Johannine community—their expulsion from the synagogue.[17] Of the texts that mention the expulsion (ἀποσυνάγωγος; Jn 9:22; 12:42; 16:2), Jn 9:22 is representative:

> His parents said this because they were afraid of the Jews, for the Jews had already agreed that anyone who confessed Jesus to be the Messiah would be put out of the synagogue (Jn 9:22; NRSV).
>
> ταῦτα εἶπαν οἱ γονεῖς αὐτοῦ ὅτι ἐφοβοῦντο τοὺς Ἰουδαίους· ἤδη γὰρ συνετέθειντο οἱ Ἰουδαῖοι ἵνα ἐάν τις αὐτὸν ὁμολογήσῃ Χριστόν, ἀποσυνάγωγος γένηται. (Jn 9:22; UBS[4])

Martyn argues that the expulsion mentioned in Jn 9:22 indicates that a *formal agreement* had been made to excommunicate Christ-confessors from the synagogue. This was not an *ad hoc* decision, but a carefully considered action with four elements: "(1) a formal decision, (2) made by Jewish authorities, (3) to bring against Christian Jews, [and] (4) the drastic measure of excommunication from the synagogue."[18] He reasons that a formal expulsion from the synagogue could not have happened during the life of Jesus and so John's references (Jn 9:22; 12:42; 16:2) are anachronistic or retrojected back into the life of Jesus.[19] Based on a careful redactional analysis of Jn 9:1-41, Martyn proposes that the text of FG witnesses to

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[15] Ashton (1991) 107. Brown's work (1979) is certainly of equal stature, but for our purposes, Martyn's work focuses the problem that this thesis addresses.

[16] Rensberger (1984) 219.

[17] See Barrett (1975) 47, 70; Brown (1966) lxxiii; Lindars (1972) 35ff; Martyn (1979) passim.

[18] Martyn (1979) 50, cf. 38-9.

[19] Casey (1996) 109-110 agrees with Martyn.

two levels simultaneously. One level witnesses to an *einmalig*[20] event from Jesus' life and another witnesses to the contemporary crisis of the Johannine community.[21] Many contemporary Johannine scholars accept this two-level reading, though not in every detail.[22]

What is important for this thesis is the move Martyn makes when he asks what historical reference outside of FG corresponds to the expulsion of the Johannine group.[23] What mechanism led to the excommunication? He looks at and then rules out both the Jewish ban[24] and the disciplinary action taken against Christians in Acts.[25] What is more probable, according to Martyn, is the synagogue use of the *Birkat ha-Minim*.[26] This refers to the Twelfth Benediction of the *Shemoneh Esreh* (Eighteen Benedictions) that was read in the synagogue and also repeated three times a day.[27] The Twelfth Benediction was probably added to the *Shemoneh Esreh* between 85 and 115 CE[28] and may be translated as follows:[29]

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[20] Martyn (1979) 29, n. 22 uses the German term, which he translates as *back there* as opposed to *now and here*, because he could not find a suitable English equivalent.

[21] Martyn (1979) 30. Several passages in the FG suggest that Christians were in serious conflict with a synagogue that expelled them (9:22; 12:42; 16:2a) and then were further persecuted (15:18-21; 16:2b; 19:38; 20:19).

[22] Setzer (1994) 205, n. 4 remarks that the two-level reading of Martyn "is seconded by virtually every major Johannine scholar." E.g., Ashton (1991) 107-11; Barrett (1978) 137-8; Beasley-Murray (1987) xlix-li; Brown (1979) 41, 174; Culpepper (1998) 54-61; Harvey (1976) 82; Kysar (1992) 918; Kysar (1993a) 119; Lindars (1981) 53; Meeks (1985) 95; Moloney (1998) 10-11; J. T. Sanders (1993) 41-7; D. Moody Smith (1990b) 279-85; Stegemann and Stegemann (1999) 226-7. However, the two-level reading is not without criticism; see Reinhartz (1998) 111-56, esp. 130-3, and Motyer (1997) 28-30.

[23] Martyn (1979) 41.

[24] There are two types of discipline or bans used in synagogues: (a) *herem*, the more severe, and (b) *nubbui*, the less severe. In both cases, there is no evidence that the ban meant excommunication prior to the third century; rather, the two types of ban were designed for inner-synagogue discipline. See Martyn (1979) 43-4.

[25] Martyn (1979) 45-50 argues that Acts does not provide proper parallels for understanding the ἀποσυνάγωγος texts in FG. According to Martyn, Acts paints a picture of Jewish-Christians who are subject to Jewish authorities and not as people who have been excommunicated (e.g., Acts 9:1-2; 22:5). Even Paul sees himself as subject to Jewish authorities—and not as one who has been excommunicated—when he appears before the Sanhedrin (Acts 23:6ff; cf. 2 Cor 11:24). The events recounted in Acts 18 and 19 are closer to the ἀποσυνάγωγος mentioned in FG, but the comparison is problematic, because Acts 18 and 19 do not refer to a formal decision to expel Jewish-Christians and Paul's "explusion" appears to be voluntary. Acts 18:5-8 depicts Paul voluntarily leaving the synagogue in Macedonia and then preaching in another synagogue at Ephesus (18:19). Acts 19:8-10 describes Paul volunteering to leave after three months.

[26] Martyn (1979) 38-42, 50-62.

[27] For a brief introduction to the Eighteen Benedictions (also called the *Shemoneh Esreh* or *Amidah*) and different versions of it, see Schürer (1979) 455-63.

[28] So Martyn 1979, 57 n. 75. Pritz (1988) 103 dates the *Birkat ha-Minim* to soon after 80 CE and adds that almost no one dates it after 95. According to *b. Ber* 28a-29b, R. Gamaliel II (the leading

For the apostates let there be no hope
And let the arrogant government
be speedily uprooted in our days.
Let the Nazarenes [Christians]
and the Minim [heretics] be destroyed in a moment
And let them be blotted out of the Book of Life
and not be inscribed together with the righteous.
Blessed art thou, O Lord, who humblest the proud!

This translation is based on the Palestinian recension of the Eighteen Benedictions that was discovered in the Cairo Geniza and published by Schechter in 1898.[30] This Geniza version is unique because it contained a condemnation of both Nazarenes (*noṣerim*) and heretics (*minim*), whereas other extant versions only mention the *minim*. Following the description of the *Birkat ha-Minim* in *b. Ber* 28b-29b, Martyn suggests that when a person was asked to read the Benedictions in the synagogue, if he stumbled over the Twelfth Benediction or if he refused to read it, he would be exposed as a Christ-confessor and subject to exclusion from the synagogue.[31] When considering the Johannine context, Martyn goes on to argue that in addition to the first trauma of expulsion from the synagogue,[32] a second trauma of intense persecution[33] seems to have followed in which the death penalty was imposed on certain members of the Johannine group for "leading people astray" to worship Jesus as a second God.[34]

One reason for the acceptance of Martyn's hypothesis, as Ashton observes, is "because of the wealth of illumination it sheds upon the Gospel itself and the satisfactory way it accounts for the one of its most puzzling features: why is the Gospel at once so Jewish and yet so anti-Jewish?"[35] Nevertheless, Martyn's proposal has been questioned, particularly regarding his use of the *Birkat ha-Minim*.

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patriarch of Yavneh from 80-110 CE) asked for a prayer against the heretics to be added to the *Shemoneh Esreh*.

[29] Martyn (1979) 58.

[30] D. Moody Smith (1994) 55, n. 35.

[31] Martyn (1979) 54. In dating of the *Birkat ha-Minim* to the late first century, Martyn relies on connecting the tradition that Samuel the Small wrote the Benediction under Gamaliel (*b. Ber.* 28a-29b) and that the *Birkat ha-Minim* was linked to Yavneh (*y. Ber.* 4.3 [8a]).

[32] Martyn (1979) 50-52, 156-7.

[33] Jn 16:2; cf. 10:28, 15:18.

[34] Martyn (1979) 72, 74-81, esp. 75; cf. Jn 7:47, *m. Sanh* 7:10, and *b. Sanh* 107b.

[35] Ashton (1991) 109.

1.3 The *Birkat Ha-Minim*

The strongest challenge comes from Kimelman and Katz who, in separate articles, arrive at similar conclusions: There is no clear evidence that the *Birkat ha-Minim* was used to curse Christians or expel them from the synagogue during the first or early second century.[36] Since Kimelman and Katz's critiques overlap and complement each other, their concerns will be treated together.[37]

1.3.1 Critiques by Kimelman and Katz

First, Kimelman addresses the issue of the *noṣerim*. Although the Geniza version, which Martyn cites, includes the term *noṣerim* and is an early witness to the Benedictions,[38] Kimelman rejects it as original. Based on rabbinic evidence, Kimelman argues that *noṣerim* was a late addition to the benedictions, so late that *b. Ber.* 28b-29a only mentions *minim*. He does not indicate when *noṣerim* was added, though Katz speculates that it was between 175 and 325 CE.[39] Even when *noṣerim* became part of the *Birkat ha-Minim* at some later point, Kimelman argues that it did not refer to Christians. Rather, he believes that the *noṣerim* referred to a Jewish sect, the Nazoraeans, which Jerome (d. 420) said were "neither Jews nor Christians" and Epiphanius (d. 403) identified as "Jews and nothing else."[40] So, then, who were the *minim*? After reviewing the tannaitic and amoraic literature of Palestine, Kimelman responds that "*minim* had a Jewish sectarian denotation and was not used to refer to Gentiles," though he concedes that the denotation of *minim* could have included Jewish Christians.[41]

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[36] Kimelman (1981) 226-44; Katz (1984) 43-76.

[37] The article by Katz (1984) 43-76 is broader in scope than Kimelman's and investigates *official* anti-Christian activity stemming from Yavneh, such as the circulation of anti-Christian letters, the use of *bans* (whether *niddui* or *ḥerem*), the prohibition against heretical books, and the *Birkat ha-Minim*.

[38] Fourth century; so J. T. Sanders (1993) 59. In addition, Pritz (1988) 104 lists three other manuscripts containing both *noṣerim* and *minim*: (1) a text of the Siddur of R. Amram Gaon published by Marx in 1907, (2) another Geniza fragment published in 1925, and (3) Rashi's comment at Brachot 30a in the first Venice printing of the Talmud. In addition, the Old Yemenite version has *minim* and *mosarim*.

[39] Katz (1984) 66.

[40] Kimelman (1981) 237-40.

[41] See *t. Ḥul* 2.22; 2.24; Kimelman (1981) 230 and 232. Horbury (1998) 93 argues that, even at the origin of the Tefillah, the imprecation against the *minim* included "invoking judgment on the wicked, both inside and outside the congregation of Israel."

Next, Kimelman tries to expose the illogic of Martyn's explanation that the Twelfth Benediction was used to expose *minim* and subject them to expulsion. If Martyn is correct, reasons Kimelman, it would require someone to identify himself voluntarily as a *min*, which seems unlikely. Who would voluntarily identify himself as a *min*? "As long as a person did not consider himself a *min* the benediction would be irrelevant and his participation in synagogue life would continue."[42]

Kimelman and Katz also look at the evidence within FG itself. They dismiss the Johannine references to expulsions as either a local phenomenon or an invented account (Lk 6:22 is dismissed as irrelevant).[43] Kimelman suggests that the accounts of expulsion may have been "concocted to persuade Christians to stay away from the synagogue,"[44] whereas Katz views the Johannine evidence as "idiosyncratic in the Christian literature of this earliest period."[45] In either case, both agree that FG cannot be directly linked to the *Birkat ha-Minim,* because the FG does not mention synagogue prayers or curses against Christians.[46] Appeals to the writings of Justin Martyr and Origen (d. 253) also fail to persuade Kimelman and Katz that synagogue prayers were used to curse Christians.[47] Even if certain statements from Justin and Origen indicated that synagogue prayers cursed Christians in the second and third centuries, juxtaposing their statements alongside the FG is deemed anachronistic.[48]

Kimelman assumes that there is a sharp dichotomy between Jews (including Jewish Christians) and Gentiles (Christian or otherwise), and argues that the *Birkat ha-Minim* was entirely *internal* to Judaism. Katz seems to agree when he writes, "The Jewish leadership directed its malediction against *all* heretics, while the Jewish Christians, who knew of the animosity against them and of the feeling that they were heretics, 'heard' the *Birkath ha-Minim* as particularly aimed at them.... Thus John

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[42] Katz (1984) 74.
[43] Kimelman (1981) 234, 396, n. 54.
[44] Kimelman (1981) 234-5.
[45] Katz (1984) 66.
[46] Kimelman (1981) 235 and Katz (1984) 66.
[47] Kimelman (1981) 35-7. Horbury (1998) 72-7, 86-7, esp. 96, concludes just the opposite: "From Justin's time onwards, an imprecation against Christians was pronounced in the synagogue."
[48] It does not allow for development between the time the FG was written and that of Justin (or Origen) and overlooks the impact of the Bar Kochba revolt, which interposed these two times; Katz (1984) 72, n. 11.

and other later second-century Christian sources could well speak of Jews cursing [Jewish] Christians in the synagogue, when in fact the malediction was against *minim* in general."[49] So, while there was some internal intolerance toward *minim*, both Kimelman and Katz believe there was no official anti-Christian policy at Yavneh and no total separation between Jews and Christians prior to the Bar Kochba revolt.[50]

The bottom line for both Kimelman and Katz is that the correlation of the *Birkat ha-Minim* with the expulsion of Christians from the synagogue mentioned in FG is without foundation, though Katz is somewhat more flexible than Kimelman.

1.3.2 Critique of Kimelman and Katz

With Kimelman and Katz, we cannot date the use of *noṣerim* to the first century with any confidence. However, in contrast to Kimelman and Katz, there are reasons for supposing that the *Birkat ha-Minim* was directed at Jewish Christians among others.

First, the use of *minim* in the Benediction can be traced back to the shadowy area that the second century casts back on the first, particularly to the time of Trajan (98-117 CE) and of Rabban Gamaliel (85-115 CE).[51] Moreover, as Alexander observes, from the viewpoint of the Rabbis, "a *min* was basically a Jew who did not accept the authority of the Rabbis and who rejected Rabbinic halakhah."[52] Thus, Jewish Christians in the Johannine community could have been targeted by the Benediction's use of *minim*. It is plausible that once any Christian, Jewish or otherwise, was cursed by a prayer like the *Birkat ha-Minim*, the whole Christian body would have been implicated, though Kimelman and Katz fail to see this type of solidarity.[53] Second, Kimelman's argument that the *Birkat ha-Minim* worked by *self-*

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[49] Katz (1984) 74; I have added the term, 'Jewish,' in brackets.

[50] Katz (1984) 76.

[51] J. T. Sanders (1993) 62 argues that *t. Ḥul.* 2.24, which links the *minim* with Jeshu ben Pantiri, can be dated to the reign of Trajan. Barrett (1975) 48 refers to *b. Ber.*28b, which links Rabban Gamaliel and the origin of the *Birkat ha-Minim,* and says: "Anything that occurred in the period of Gamaliel occurred in the period of the Fourth Gospel." Katz (1984) 68 also believes that the maledictions against the *minim* in *t. Sanh.* 13:4-6 and *t. Ber.* 3:25 can be dated after 70 CE.

[52] Alexander (1992) 18.

[53] Horbury (1998) 9, 71; Casey (1996) 107.

exclusion, rather than by expulsion, underestimates the power of social ostracism.[54] Even if a suspected *min* did not identify himself as such, surely being suspected of *minuth* (heresy) would have been enough to initiate the forces (physical or otherwise) of ostracism.[55] Third, Casey rightly criticizes Kimelman's sharp distinction between Jewish sectarians and Gentile Christians as compartmentalized, oversimplifying "doubtful or shifting identities."[56] Boundaries between different Jewish groups were fluid and overlapping. Failing to perceive such complexity, Kimelman seems to deny Jewish Christian sectarians the status of being counted among the Christians. Only if Jewish Christians are not counted can Kimelman say there is "a lack of evidence for an *Anti-Christian* Jewish prayer in late antiquity."[57] Fourth, Kimelman and Katz underplay the Johannine evidence.[58] Kimelman treats the FG as an isolated account and suggests that John might have "concocted" the reports of excommunication to prevent Christians from "being tempted" to attend synagogues. This is plainly contrary to the *Sitz im Leben* of the FG, which depicts Christians so thoroughly Jewish that they had to be removed from the synagogue.[59] Similarly, Katz dismisses the Johannine evidence as "idiosyncratic." Admittedly, the formal element that Martyn observes in Jn 9:22 appears to be unique to FG, but otherwise FG reflects similar accounts of Jewish hostility toward Jewish Christians.[60] Lastly, Kimelman and Katz's laconic remarks that FG neither mentions the *cursing* of Christians nor even *synagogue prayers* are not entirely correct. FG does provide evidence that some Jews were cursed because of their sympathies with Christ. In FG, the chief priests

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[54] In a related vein, Setzer (1994) 90 notes that the *Birkat ha-Minim* does not express anything about expelling people from the synagogue. Although this is true, it hard to imagine that, once identified and cursed as *minim*, people would have wanted, or been allowed, to stay in the synagogue.

[55] As Barclay (1995) 116 reminds us that issues like defection or apostasy is "an ascribed as much as it is an achieved status." One needs only recall Macarthyism, which involved the persecution of suspected communists during the 1950s in America, to realize that one's self-perception is not decisive in matters of social exclusion and even official sanction.

[56] Casey (1996) 107.

[57] My emphasis. Kimelman (1981) 226 uses this phrase in the title of his article.

[58] Casey (1996) 106-7 agrees.

[59] Jn 9:34 states that *the Jews* "threw the man out," ἐξέβαλον αὐτὸν ἔξω; see Meeks (1975) passim; Casey (1996) 106; Culpepper (1998) 11.

[60] E.g., *Ant.* 10.200; Acts 5:5; 13:50; 18:6-7; 17:10, 14; 19:9; 22:19; 1 Thess 2:14-16; cf. Casey (1996) 108-9 and Horbury (1998) 100. Also, it is noteworthy that Matt 5:11 and Lk 6:22 are Christian blessings that are in response to some sort of expulsion or action similar to those raised by the *Birkat ha-Minim*. However, as Rowland (1985) 300 points out, there is no evidence from Acts that a curse was used against Christians.

and Pharisees confront certain temple guards about why they did not arrest Jesus. They say to the guards:

> Has anyone of the authorities or of the Pharisees believed in him? But this crowd, which does not know the law—they are **accursed** (Jn 7:48-49; NRSV).
>
> μή τις ἐκ τῶν ἀρχόντων ἐπίστευσεν εἰς αὐτὸν ἢ ἐκ τῶν Φαρισαίων; ἀλλὰ ὁ ὄχλος οὗτος ὁ μὴ γινώσκων τὸν νόμον **ἐπάρατοί** εἰσιν (Jn 7:48-49; UBS[4])

This confrontation occurs on the temple grounds just after a Jewish crowd had declared that Jesus was the prophet, while other Jews exclaimed that he was the Messiah (Jn 7:40-41). This prompts the priests and Pharisees to accuse *this crowd* of not knowing the law (concerning the Messiah) and to declare that *they are accursed*, (ἐπάρατοί εἰσιν). The term, ἐπάρατος, like ἐπικατάρατος (Gal 3:13), implies that one has already been condemned by God.[61] The way FG presents it, certain Jews have been cursed for confessing Christ. However, Kimelman is correct to say that FG does not mention a specific prayer of malediction, but perhaps wrong to assume that it should, since the main complaint of the Christian Jews was exclusion and persecution, not a specific form of cursing.[62]

On the whole, correlating the *Birkat ha-Minim* with FG has raised a debate that is hardly resolved. If Martyn's hypothesis is not entirely persuasive, then neither are Kimelman and Katz's criticisms. If the term *noṣerim* was not part of the original *Birkat ha-Minim*, then the use of *minim* in the Benediction could have targeted, among others, Jewish Christians. But this does not resolve the issue either, because the precise dating of the Benediction remains hidden in the shadows that the second century casts back on the first.[63] Again, on the testimony of FG, Jewish sympathizers with Christ were cursed, but it is unclear what that entailed or whether it referred to the *Birkat ha-Minim* or something else like it. Additional arguments *against* correlating the Benediction with FG could be added to the debate,[64] as can arguments

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[61] So Louw and Nida (1988) § 33.475. Cf. Jn 7:51, which corroborates that the issue is condemnation.

[62] Horbury (1998) 100-1, Lincoln (2000) 275-6.

[63] The issue of dating the *Birkat ha-Minim* to the late first century relies on the debated date and reliability of Tannaitic traditions that link the Benediction to Samuel the Small (*b. Ber.*28a-29b) and Yavneh (*y. Ber.* 4.3 [8a]).

[64] Setzer (1994) 90-91 offers six such arguments.

for such a correlation.[65] Some scholars continue to argue that the Benediction is the best possible or probable explanation.[66] Others mention it, but view it as unnecessary[67] and still others else reject it altogether.[68] Clearly, we are at an impasse.

1.4 Is the *Birkat Ha-Minim* Necessary?

The very reason why Martyn reached for the *Birkat ha-Minim* was to help link FG to a plausible historical context. And yet that seems to be the very thing our current knowledge of the Benediction is unable to supply. Is there another way forward? Could another mechanism beside the *Birkat ha-Minim* supply the type of explanation necessary to make sense of Jewish Christian expulsions from the synagogue? And could it, at the same time, satisfy the two-level reading of FG and the four elements identified by Martyn in Jn 9:22?

Some scholars have hinted that the way forward would be to search for an alternative explanation that is, at the same time, in continuity with the use of the *Birkat ha-Minim* in the second century.[69] For example, Culpepper writes, "The action in view in John may not have been the enforcement of the *Birkath ha-Minim* as argued by J. Louis Martyn, but it probably reflects the kind of situation that led to the adoption of this blessing."[70] In a private letter to Martyn, Wayne Meeks stated his belief that what was depicted as punctiliar events in Gamaliel's time by *b. Ber* 28 was actually "a linear development stretching over a lengthy period and culminating in the pertinent formulation of the *Birkath ha-Minim*, perhaps quite a bit later than Gamaliel."[71] Similarly, Hengel concludes that "the *Birkat ha-Minim,* the exact date of which we

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[65] J. T. Sanders (1993) 58-61.

[66] Although each scholar has qualifications, those that generally accept it include: Ashton (1991) 108-09, n. 102; Lincoln (2000) 277; W. D. Davies (1999) 198; Dunn (1991) 221-2; J. T. Sanders (1993) 58-60; Painter (1986) 39; Lindars (1981) 50.

[67] Wilson (1995) 73; Meeks (1985) 102, Stibbe (1992) 61.

[68] Margaret Davies (1992) 299; Stegemann and Stegemann (1999) 238.

[69] Those who accept some sort of continuity between the FG and the malediction include: Lincoln (2000) 277; Beasley-Murray (1987) lxxvii-lxxviii; Culpepper (1998) 57; Kysar (1975) 171; Meeks in Martyn (1979) 55, n. 69; and in Martyn (1979) 57, n. 75. Those who accept the *Birkat ha-Minim* as a probable context, include: Dunn (1991) 222; Brown (1979) 22; Lindars (1981) 50-51; Martyn (1979) 50-62; J. T. Sanders (1993) 59-60; and D. Moody Smith (1994) 55.

[70] Culpepper (1998) 57, cf.44.

[71] The words are Marytn's paraphrase of Meeks; see Martyn (1979) 55, n. 69. D. Moody Smith (1990a) 86 is also in agreement with the trajectory approach of Meeks and Culpepper.

do not know, is simply the ultimate consequence of a development full of combat and suffering."[72]

Comments like these suggest that the *Birkat ha-Minim* may not be necessary for understanding FG's enigmatic use of ἀποσυνάγωγος. In fact, one need not appeal to the *Birkat ha-Minim* to explain FG's use of ἀποσυνάγωγος, as Ashton seems to have done, and yet affirm much of Martyn's proposal regarding his two-reading of FG![73] Indeed, Meeks asserts straightforwardly that the *Birkat ha-Minim* is "a red herring in Johannine research,"[74] while Wilson states categorically "it is not essential to connect the expulsion from the synagogue with the *Birkat ha-minim.*"[75] If the Benediction is left aside, there is still a need to explain the historical context to which Jn 9:22 points and, to date, no carefully documented or convincing alternative has been proposed.

1.5 Is there an Alternative Explanation?

The search for a convincing alternative begins with a basic question: If the *Birkat ha-Minim* is set-aside for the moment, what other Jewish decision or action could have resulted in the expulsion of Jewish Christians from the synagogue? And, more fundamentally, what could have provoked a direct expulsion from the synagogue? From the outset, it should be stated that, as with other complex socio-historical realities, the factors were probably multiple. Nevertheless, the following options may be identified and assessed.

(1) Bans and *ad hoc* decisions. As we have seen, Martyn believes that the use of synagogue bans and the *ad hoc* decisions referred to in Acts are inadequate to explain the expulsion of Jewish Christians depicted in FG. Regarding the issue of bans, Martyn finds support from Katz who argues that the *niddui* form of ban was "never aimed at separating a Jew from Judaism ... [and] ... someone under the ban (*niddui*)

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[72] Hengel (1989) 115.

[73] Ashton (1991) 124-59 discusses the religious dispute between the Johannine group and other Jews, and yet, in this discussion, never mentions the *Birkat ha-Minim*, even though he cites Martyn's hypothesis approvingly (e.g., 107).

[74] Meeks (1985) 102; cf. Motyer (1997) 93.

[75] Wilson (1995) 73.

was not excluded from participation in the life of the synagogue."[76] Furthermore, that the *ḥerem* was the mechanism for expelling Jewish Christians referred to in Jn 9:22 is unlikely, since all uses of *ḥerem,* meaning full excommunication from Judaism, have a post-mishnaic provenance.[77] When we turn to expulsions mentioned in Acts,[78] where Jewish Christians are forced to exit the synagogues on certain occasions, there is a noticeable lack of formal deliberation or the setting of policy to exclude Jewish Christians on the basis of certain beliefs, like Christ-confession. Thus, the expulsions mentioned in Acts do not fully illuminate Jn 9:22.

(2) **An Anti-Temple group.** Some have argued that the introduction of another group of Jewish believers, like an anti-Temple faction from Samaria, who held views of Jesus that were intolerable for non-believing Jews, led to conflict and eventual separation.[79] Although this is possible, it is hypothetical and it would be imprudent to build one uncertain hypothesis on another. Furthermore, it would have to be shown that their particular beliefs or behavior could have provoked formal proceedings to expel and even execute their members, as indicated by Jn 9:22 and 16:2.

(3) **Non-Jewish converts.** Another explanation is that the Johannine Jewish Christians accepted certain non-Jewish converts, which offended other Jews.[80] Again, this may have happened, but it does not appear to have been the central concern for the Johannine community, because Gentile or non-Jewish inclusion never becomes a point of controversy in FG.

(4) **Jewish-Christian pacifism during the Jewish revolt.** The Jewish-Christian stance toward the Jewish revolt of 66-70 C.E. tended to be pacifistic and could have engendered hatred from Jews who took a militant stance against the Romans.[81] Again, this issue does not seem to arise in FG.

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[76] Katz (1984) 49.
[77] Katz (1984) 49.
[78] Some of the key texts include: Acts 9:1-2; 13:44-50; 14:2-6; 14:19; 17:5-9; 17:13; 18:6-7; 18:12-17; 19:8-9; 21:27-32; 22:4-5; 23:12-15.
[79] Brown (1979) 37; Kysar (1992) 3.918.
[80] Kysar (1992) 3.918.

(5) The charge of *leading people astray*. Martyn argues that the Johannine Jewish Christians were accused of leading other Jews astray. This arises in one instance in FG. Through the voice of the Pharisees, the Temple guards are questioned regarding ambivalence toward Jesus:

> ... Surely you have not been deceived too, have you?" (Jn 7:47; NRSV).
>
> ... Μὴ καὶ ὑμεῖς πεπλάνησθε; (Jn 7:47; UBS[4])

Martyn argues that behind the use of πλανάω in 7:47 stands the technical, rabbinic use of תעה, הדּיח, "to lead astray to do something."[82] In the context of the Johannine community, the deception involved leading Jews astray to worship Jesus as a second god (Jn 5:18).[83] As it is widely understood, persons found guilty of such deception should receive the death sentence (Deut 13:6ff; *b. Sanh.* 107b). It is important to note that, in Martyn's scheme, the accusation of "leading people astray" explains why the Johannine group was persecuted and refers to the second trauma of the community (Jn 16:2), whereas the use of the *Birkat ha-Minim* against Christ-confessors explains why they were expelled from the synagogue and refers to the first trauma. The charge of "leading people astray" is ruled out as the primary factor in the expulsion from the synagogue, because it explains the issue of execution (Jn 16:2), but not excommunication (Jn 9:22).

(6) Points of sensitivity. Another way to proceed is to look within FG itself for *points of sensitivity*, which Dunn describes as points "at which an effort is evidently being made to clarify some confusion or to counter opposing views."[84] If certain points of sensitivity could be identified as contributing to the apparent hostility between the Johannine Jewish Christians and other non-believing Jews, it might suggest an alternative explanation for the expulsion from the synagogue. Dunn notes several points of sensitivity related to Johannine Christology, including the repeated contrast between Jesus and John the Baptist, the christologically centered battles over the law and Sabbath, the mounting *krisis* depicted in Jn 5-12, and the way in which the Evangelist depicts the disciples' stages of faith in Christ. Picking up Dunn's

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[81] Kysar (1992) 3.918.
[82] Martyn (1979) 159.
[83] Martyn (1979) 74-81, 158-160.
[84] Dunn (1998a) 354.

insight, Motyer identifies seven points of sensitivity, including conflict over the Temple and its festivals, the legitimacy of the law, religious authority (revelation and open heaven), the Ἰουδαῖοι, confession of Christ (Jn 20:31), the role of signs, and the polemical style of FG.[85] Each of these points of sensitivity raised by Dunn and Moyter could provide a point of departure for discovering an alternative explanation. However, such an alternative would have to show why or on what grounds expulsion was justified, which is not readily apparent from the points of sensitivity that have been mentioned. For example, it is not altogether clear why confessing Jesus as Messiah would have led to expulsion, since, for instance, Rabbi Akiba was not expelled from the synagogue when he believed Bar Kochba was the Messiah.[86]

(7) **Blasphemy.** There are a number of considerations that suggest that the Johannine Jewish Christians were regarded as blasphemous. This would account for their expulsion from the synagogue.

First, the emphasis the narrative of FG places on blasphemy suggests that it might hold the key to an alternative explanation. Unlike the Synoptic Gospels, the charge of blasphemy is repeatedly, either explicitly or implicity, brought against Jesus in FG.[87] FG's emphasis on blasphemy (at least relative to the Synoptics) suggests that the issue of blasphemy was a concern to the Johannine group in ways that were not to the authors and earliest readers of the Synoptic Gospels.

Second, the prosecution of blasphemy seems to match the four elements observed in Jn 9:22—(a) a formal or legal decision (b) by Jewish authorities (c) to expel (d) people who make offensive statements. Although Jn 9:22 mentions expulsion and not blasphemy, there may be a connection, formal or informal, between different forms of social distancing (excommunication and execution) and verbal distancing (labeling someone a blasphemer), as the following considerations indicate. First, FG mentions both ἀποσυνάγωγος and killing Christians in the same verse (Jn 16:2), indicating

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[85] Motyer (1997) 35-73.
[86] L. Levine (1993) 143.
[87] Cf. Jn 5:18; 8:58; 10:33-36; and 18:23. See Harvey (1976) 51-3, 58-9.

that expulsion and execution are related.[88] Second, Luke 6:22-23 links *exclusion* (ἀφορίζειν), which refers to a ***breaking off*** of community relations, with *speaking disparagingly of a person* (ὀνειδιζεῖν) and *casting out a person's name as evil* (ἐκβαλλεῖν τό ὄνομα ὑμῶν ὡς πονηρόν). Third, there are indications in some Jewish legal texts that people accused of blasphemy were both expelled and executed (Lev 24:13-16), whereas other texts indicate that only excommunication is required for blasphemy (1QS 7.1) or excommunication (*kārēt*) for certain types of blasphemy (*y. Sanh.* 7.25a-b; *b. Ker.* 7a-b).[89]

Third, Martyn's two-level reading reinforces the possibility that the issue of blasphemy accounts for the expulsion. The two-level reading is, without apology, an allegorical interpretation, where the story of Jesus is simultaneously the story of the Johannine community.[90] As it becomes clear in reading Martyn's *History & Theology*, persons and events at the *einmalig* level represent persons and experiences of the Johannine community. Jesus represents the leader of the Johannine group; the Pharisees are the Yavnean rabbis; *the Jews* are Jews in the synagogue who persecute Johannine Christians; Nicodemus stands for secret believers; the blind man's expulsion from the synagogue corresponds to the experience of Jewish Christians; and the persecution of Jesus corresponds to the persecution of his followers (15:18-20). As previously mentioned, this type of reading is widely accepted. It suggests that the charge of blasphemy against Jesus corresponds to charges of blasphemy against members of the Johannine community.

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[88] As Setzer (1994) 93, 96 and Brown (1979) 93-4, 106-7 have argued, it is possible that the reference to ***killing*** Christians in Jn 16:2 concerned the indirect death of Christians; that is, once Christians were deprived of the umbrella of Judaism, they were no longer exempt from imperial worship and did not have the right of assembly, thereby becoming vulnerable to the Romans. The problem with this view is that FG indicates that Jewish Christians were in fear of other Jews, not the Romans.

[89] Cf. Harvey (1976) 77-8; Bock (1998) 93-4,106-7.

[90] An allegorical interpretation is suggested by Martyn (1979) 24-36 and Martyn (1977) 171-5. Indeed, the FG itself seems to encourage such an approach (cf. 15:18-21). Ashton (1991) 412-20 defends the two-level reading of FG on the basis of his analysis of Jn 2:19-22. For an incisive critique of reading the FG allegorically, see Motyer (1997) 13-16. A major pitfall in reconstructing the history of the Johannine communities through allegorical correlation is the lack of historical control or criteria. This lack is underscored by the variety of proposals for the *Sitz im Leben* for the Johannine communities. See the survey by Brodie (1993) 15-21.

Fourth, history shows that certain social dynamics can be observed across time and culture regarding the connection between excommunication and allegations of blasphemy.[91] One recent situation in particular exhibits this connection and is analogous to FG. Over the past sixteen years in Pakistan, a considerable number of blasphemy charges have been brought against both Christians and Ahmadiyya Muslims (Ahmadis). The account of the Christians begins in 1986 when new Pakistani blasphemy laws, known as 295-B and 295-C, stipulated life in prison for desecration of the Qur'an and the death penalty for blasphemy.[92] Under these laws, more than a dozen Christians have been charged with blasphemy, which is not surprising since the Qur'an identifies common Christian confessions as blasphemous.[93]Although Christians have not been executed, three have been sentenced to death, two have died in police custody and, in one instance, fourteen Christian families were *forcibly banished* from their village after two men were accused of *blasphemy*.[94] The account of the Ahmadis begins much further back. Their founder, Mirza Ghulam Ahmad (1835-1908)[95] was accused of *blasphemy* when he proclaimed, among other things, that he was the Messiah. However, it was not until 1974 that the Pakistani government and the Muslim World League declared that the Ahmadis were "non-Muslim."[96] As a result, they were *excommunicated* from Mosques and boycotted socially, economically, and culturally. This was followed by a further measure in 1984 by the Pakistani government, which made it a criminal offence for Ahmadis to call themselves Muslim, practice Muslim forms of worship, or use Muslim terms of greeting. Any public claim that Ahmad is the Messiah is

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[91] See the unsurpassed history of blasphemy by Levy (1993).

[92] "Suffering Saints: The Plight of Pakistani Christians," produced by CBN Online; available from http://www.cbn.org/news/stories/980921.asp; Internet accessed Sept 23, 1998.

[93] In the authoritative English-Arabic version of the Qur'an, Abdullah Yusuf Ali writes, "The doctrines of Trinity, equality with Allah, and (Jesus') sonship, are repudiated as blasphemies." See note 676 for Surah 4.171 (cf. 5.72-73) in *The Holy Qur'an: English translation of the meanings and Commentary* (Saudi Arabia: The Presidency of Islamic Researches, IFTA, Call and Guidance, n.d.).

[94] "Catholic Bishop Challenges Pakistani President on Blasphemy Case," reported by Asawal Sardar, Karachi, November 1996 for *Compass Direct* (available from http://www.best.com/~ray6/3/database/Daily News/1196001.htm). Also see "Persecution: Pakistani Bishop's Death Sparks Riots" (June 15, 1989) produced by *Christianity Online* (available from http://www.christianity.net/ct/81//81/18a.html) and "Religious Intolerance In Pakistan" posted by *The Center for Religious Tolerance* (available from http://www.religioustolerance.org/ rt_pakis.htm).

[95] Ghulam Ahmad (1996 [Urdu 1898]) 10 indicates that his birth was 1839 or 1840 CE; however, the historian, Muhammad Ali (1937) 1, n. 1, argues that it was probably 13 February 1835.

[96] The official reports of the Federal Shariat Court, Islamabad, Pakistan, are published by the Dar-Al-Hadyan in *Quadianis are not Muslim* (1996), see esp. 189-90.

blasphemous. Any use of the common confession—"There is no God except Allah and Mohammed is his prophet"—is prohibited.[97] In the last decade, 152 Ahmadis have been arrested for blasphemy. Although none have been officially executed to date, 34 have been murdered, some in the presence of police. For our purposes, there are two items to highlight regarding the use or abuse of Pakistani blasphemy laws: (a) Expulsion from the community and allegations of blasphemy went hand-in-hand.[98] (b) The founder of the Ahmadiyya movement was accused of blasphemy and, eventually, his followers were also so regarded. Although this is only suggestive, it reinforces the possibility that, like Jesus, the Johannine Jewish Christians were accused of blasphemy and this explains the references to ἀποσυνάγωγος in FG (Jn 9:22; 12:42; 16:2).

1.6 Proposal

These four reasons—(1) the emphasis FG places on blasphemy, (2) the correspondence between the four elements mentioned in Jn 9:22 and prosecuting blasphemy, (3) the two-level reading of FG, and (4) the observation that blasphemy and excommunication often go hand-in-hand—intimate that the Johannine Jewish Christians were regarded as blasphemous or directly accused of blasphemy. However, this is merely suggested by what we have seen so far. What is needed is convincing evidence. *Therefore, the purpose of this thesis is to determine whether non-believing Jews could have regarded the Johannine Jewish Christians as blasphemous and, secondarily, whether this would have been sufficient to account for their expulsion from the synagogue.*[99]

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[97] The 1993 Supreme Court of Pakistan stated that Islamic phrases were copyrighted trademarks of the Islamic faith and therefore could not be used by Ahmadis; see "Religious Intolerance in Pakistan," by the Center for Religious Tolerance; available from http://www.religioustolerance.org/rt_pakis.htm.

[98] Over the centuries, expelling people from community life and enforcing blasphemy laws have worked in tandem to purify groups from the perceived contamination of certain individuals and their actions. The social historian, Leonard Levy (1993) xi argues that the charge of blasphemy reveals "what a society will not and cannot tolerate. Blasphemy is a litmus test of the standards a society believes it must enforce to preserve its unity, its peace, its morality, its feelings, and the road to salvation."

[99] We are primarily looking for *theological reasons* for the expulsion or separation, but at the same time we recognize that *sociological* and *cultural* factors contributed to the process. We agree with the concern of J. T. Sanders (1993) 82-151 that all too often scholars have provided *theological-cultural reasons* (e.g., high christology, a *gentilizing* of Christianity) to explain Jewish-Christian conflict and separation, but have neglected *sociological factors* (e.g., theories of social conflict and deviance).

If it can be shown that the Johannine Jewish Christians were probably expelled from the synagogue for blasphemous beliefs and behavior, it could provide an alternative to the problematic *Birkat ha-Minim* explanation for the expulsion mentioned in FG. Before examining key texts concerning blasphemy in early Jewish tradition (Chapters 5-12), it will be helpful to survey recent research on blasphemy in early Judaism and Christianity (Chapter 2), discuss particular considerations regarding the probable contexts of FG and the significance of *mirror-reading* FG (Chapter 3), and provide a basis semantic analysis of βλασφημέω and related terms (Chapter 4).

CHAPTER 2
RECENT RESEARCH ON BLASPHEMY

This chapter surveys a selected number of works that contribute to the discussion on blasphemy in significant ways. The survey provides a basic orientation to the relevant issues, the way the subject has been approached in the past and, most importantly, how scholars have addressed the issue in FG. Although other works could have been included here,[100] the following scholars have been selected because they either provide seminal works (Strack-Billerbeck and Bock), unique perspectives (Sanders and Brown), representative opinions (Dunn and others), or direct engagement with FG (Harvey and O'Neill) regarding blasphemy.

2.1 Strack and Billerbeck (1922-28)

Strack and Billerbeck (hereafter Strack-Billerbeck) have, to a large degree, influenced much of the twentieth-century discussion on blasphemy. They provided one of the first comparisons between the Rabbinic and the Gospels' depiction of blasphemy. The incongruities between the Gospels and the Rabbinic literature were noted by Strack-Billerbeck and have, subsequently, played a major role in scholarship on blasphemy in the NT, particularly as it relates to Jesus' trial. In their *Kommentar*, Strack-Billerbeck treat the issue of blasphemy in a section on Matt 26:65 and, to a lesser extent, in a section on Jn 10:33-34.[101]

2.1.1 "Then the high priest tore his clothes"

Without commenting on the historical or literary contexts, Strack-Billerbeck offer *y. Sanh* 7:25a, 65 as a rabbinic parallel to Matt 26:65a regarding the high priest tearing his clothes. The passage from the *Yerushalmi* tells a story about R. Simeon b. Laqisch (ca. 250) who repeatedly tears his clothes each time a certain Samaritan blasphemes (גדף) God. Finally, R. Simeon sarcastically asks the Samaritan if his mother is able to make enough clothes for him to tear. As this *halakah* makes clear, clothes must be

[100] See Bock (1998) 5-29.
[101] Strack-Billerbeck (1922-28) 1.1007-19 and 2.542-3.

torn upon hearing blasphemy. If there is a question about whether blasphemy has been heard within a specific text or context, the renting of garments (or lack of it) ought to provide an immediate answer.[102]

2.1.2 "He has blasphemed!"

While providing pages of (presumed) rabbinic parallels to Matt 26:65b regarding the charge of blasphemy, Strack-Billerbeck make several significant claims. First, they cite Ex 22:27 as a key text for the entire discussion and argue that, prior to R. Aqiba (d. ca. 135), the warning against blaspheming אלהים in Ex 22:27 pertained to heathen gods.[103] Only with R. Aqiba did Ex 22:27 come to be understood as a reference to blasphemy against God. Although the rabbis debated whether אלהים referred to gods, judges, or God,[104] with the completion of the *Bavli*, Ex 22:27 came to be understood as a reference to blasphemy against both God and judges.[105] Second, after quoting Num 15:30f, Strack-Billerbeck provide a three-fold typology for organizing the rabbinic use of the term מגדף[106] which, it appears, has been recently adopted by Bock:[107]

> (a) מגדף, in the broad sense, refers to a blasphemer who speaks against the Torah and, by association, against God;
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> (b) מגדף, more narrowly, denotes an idolater, which derives from Num 15:30f. and concerns a מגדף being "cut off "(כרת) from his people. This was the view of R. Ishmael (ca. 135) and most of the rabbis during Ishmael's time; and
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> (c) מגדף, in the narrowest sense (cf. R. Aqiba), is one who curses the Name.

Third, on the basis of some traditions, Strack-Billerbeck argue that the blasphemer and the idolater are similar in that they reject the entire law and, furthermore, what is demonstrated of one may be applied to the other.[108] So, for example, the blasphemer and the idolater are both hanged after they are stoned to death, whereas others who

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[102] Cf. *y. Mo'ed Qat.*3.83b, 28; cf. *m. Sanh.* 7:5; *Sifra* on Lev. 24:10-23.

[103] As in LXX Ex 22:28; Josephus Ant 4.8.10; Philo *Quest Ex* 2.5.

[104] R. Ishamel argued that אלהים referred to judges; cf. *Mek.* on Ex 22:27 (102b); *b. Sanh.* 66a.

[105] *B. Sanh* 7.66a; cf. Strack-Billerbeck (1922) 1.1010.

[106] Strack-Billerbeck (1922) 1.1010f. The word מגדף is the piel participle of גדף, "to revile or blaspheme" (see BDB 154).

[107] Bock (1998) 38 uses a similar scheme in his analysis of Num 15:30-31.

[108] Strack-Billerbeck (1922) 1. 1011; cf. *Sifré Deut* 21.22; *Sifré Num* 15.31; *y. Sanh.* 7.25b, 9.

are stoned are not hanged.[109] Despite similarities, blasphemy was considered more severe than idolatry. Whereas an idolater despises the commandment without denying God, a blasphemer not only sets himself over God's commandment, "he deliberately takes on God himself"[110] or, as Strack-Billerbeck put it elsewhere, "he presumptuously approaches God himself, taking his recognition and honor away from him."[111] Fourth, some rabbinic sources indicate that blasphemy was primarily a verbal offense[112] involving a clear and fully articulated vocalization of the divine name יהוה.[113] Fifth, after the commencement of the Christian period, the *halakah* reveals an increasing tendency to link the death penalty to blasphemy, which also became associated with cursing God by invoking another deity.[114] Strack-Billerbeck conclude by saying that they are uncertain if this *halakah* was in operation during the trial of Jesus; however, if it was, Jesus' execution was unlawful because he neither spoke the sacred name nor used the name of another deity.[115] Here, Strack-Billerbeck identify a tension between the description of blasphemy in rabbinic literature and the charge of blasphemy against Jesus in the Gospels, and it is a tension that almost every subsequent scholar has felt obligated to address.

2.1.3 "You, being a man, make yourself God."

Since Strack-Billerbeck treat blasphemy thoroughly in their section on Matt 26:64, their comments are more brief for Jn 10:33 regarding Jesus making himself to be God.[116] Here they identify two 'parallel' comments by R. Abbahu (ca. 300). The first is a warning that anyone who says he is God is a liar which, according to Strack-Billerbeck, was a reference to Jesus.[117] The second comment appears to be directed

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[109] *M. Sanh* 6:4; cf. *y. Sanh* 6. 23c, 19 for R. Eliezer's different opinion.

[110] "Er greift in bewußter Weise Gott selbst an." Strack-Billerbeck (1922) 1.1012; cf. *b. Ker.*79b; *y. Sanh.* 7.25b.

[111] "Er tastet in Vermessenheit Gott selbst an, entzieht ihm Anerkennung u. Ehre." Strack-Billerbeck (1922) 1.1017.

[112] Strack-Billerbeck (1922) 1.1011; cf. *b. Ker.* 79b; *b. Pesaḥ* 93b.

[113] Strack-Billerbeck (1922) 1.1013-4; cf. *Sifra Lev.* 24:10-23; *m. Šebu.* 4.13

[114] "Durch einen Götzennamen erfolgen." Strack-Billerbeck (1922) 1.1018.

[115] Strack-Billerbeck (1922) 1.1018.

[116] Strack-Billerbeck (1924) 2.542. The noun βλασφημία (10:33) and the verb βλασφημέω (10:36 once) each occur only once in FG.

[117] *Y. Ta'an.* 2.65b, 59: R. Abbahu (c. 300) has said: "If a person says, 'I am God,' he is lying; [if he says] 'I am the Son of Man (the Messiah),' he will ultimately live to regret having said that; if he says, 'I am going up to heaven,' he will not necessarily regret that."

against some form of trinitarian thought.[118] Here R. Abbahu contrasts an earthly king with God; the king can be a father, son, and brother at the same time, but God, who is absolute, has no such counterparts. Lastly, Stack-Billerbeck cite *Ex. Rab.* 8 (73a), which identifies four "wicked people" (*Frevler*) who made themselves to be God—Hiram (Ezek 28:2), Nebuchadnezzar (Isa 14:13), Pharoah (Ezek 29:3), and Joash (2 Chron 24:17).

2.1.4 Evaluation

Although it has broad influence on NT scholarship,[119] it is now generally regarded that Strack and Billerbeck's *Kommentar* is methodologically flawed in several areas.[120] A major question concerns dating: Is the rabbinic material, whose final compilations occurred long after NT documents were written, suitable for comparison to FG?

Attempts to date rabbinic material generally rely on the names of rabbis cited in specific texts as points of reference. Stemberger believes that the Tannaitic attributions are generally reliable[121] and he is fairly confident that a chronology of the rabbis is possible on a generation-by-generation basis.[122] Similarly, Goldberg is not only confident that the Mishnah reflects four generations of rabbis, but also argues

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[118] *Ex. Rab.* 29 (88b).

[119] Rather sarcastically, Neill and N.T. Wright (1988) 292 write, "In the dark days before Strack-Billerbeck we referred to rabbinic matters cautiously, if at all; in this bright post-Strack-Billerbeck epoch, we are all rabbinic experts, though at second hand."

[120] Strack-Billerbeck received a devastating critique by Sandmel (1962) 1-13, esp. 8-11. According to Sandmel, Strack-Billerbeck committed four basic errors: (a) They create the impression that the NT was influenced by rabbinic literature, some of which dates to the fifth century. (b) They confuse the citation of selected passages with a thorough understanding of the intent, tone, and import of the literature. (c) They confuse quantity with quality by piling up alleged rabbinic parallels that lends a tone of authority but may actually obscure what should be seen. (d) They fail to exhibit scholarly impartiality and thereby "manage to demonstrate that what Jesus said was finer and better" than rabbis who seem to say the same thing. In a similar vein, E. P. Sanders (1977) 42 is critical of how Billerbeck has "more than any other passed on Weber's soteriological scheme [that salvation in Judaism was a matter of gaining merit through good works and keeping the law] to the present generation" and thereby "distorted the clear meaning of a text or has prejudiced a question by his selections."

[121] In support, Stemberger (1996) 57-58 cites Neusner's article, "The History of Earlier rabbinic Judaism," HR 16 (1977) 216-36 and Kraemer's "On the Reliability of Attributions in the Babylonian Talmud," *HUCA* 60 (1989) 175-90.

[122] Stemberger (1996) claims that we can discern five generations of Tannaim and seven of Amoraim, but gives specific dates only for the second generation (c. 90-130 CE) and the third generation (c. 130-160 CE) of Tannaites. Similarly, Danby (1933) 799-800 lists six generations of the Tannaim from c. 10 to 240 CE.

"the Mishnah can be properly understood and interpreted only when the relationship between each layer remains clearly recognizable."[123] The optimism of Stemberger and Goldberg is contrasted with the pessimism of Neusner, who has given up trying to date rabbinic sayings. The decisive problem, as Neusner puts it, "is that we cannot demonstrate, and therefore cannot take as fact, that what is attributed to a given sage really was said by him."[124] Hence, Neusner has decided that the only course of action is to set forth the sequence document by document[125] and the only firm and factual date that can be assigned to material in a document is the time of its final redaction.[126] Admirably, Neusner tries to avoid overstating facts and offering misleading dates. However, his recent emphasis on the final compilations without distinguishing the multi-layered traditions that have contributed to the final documents can itself be misleading; his positivistic approach[127] leads him to unwarranted skepticism about some rabbinic traditions that can be traced to a time roughly contemporaneous with late first-century and early-second century Christianity. Therefore, I will follow the approach of Stemberger and Goldberg and accept an attribution of a particular Tanna as reliable, unless there is reason to reject it.[128]

Some of the citations by Strack-Billerbeck, therefore, deserve further investigation. Sayings regarding blasphemy attributed to early Tannaim can be compared to what is presented in FG, since the Tannaim flourished between the time of the fall of

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[123] Goldberg (1987) 219.

[124] Neusner (1994) 15.

[125] Neusner (1994) 13 presents two sequences. He lists (a) the Mishnah as the earliest, (b) then the Tosefta, (c) the Yerushalmi, and (d) finally the Bavli. For the midrashim, he lists (a) the Sifra and the two Sifrés, (b) then Leviticus Rabbah, Pesiqta deRab Kahana, and Pesiqta Rabbati, and (c) finally Ruth Rabbah, Esther Rabbah Part One, Lamentations Rabbah, and Song of Songs Rabbah. He assigns the Sifra and the two Sifrés as post-Mishnah.

[126] Neusner (1994) 17.

[127] Neusner maintains that there are "no tests of validation or falsification of attributions" (1994, 15) and "what we cannot show we do not know" (1994, 16). This insistence on "strong verification" seems to echo the tenets of logical positivism, which asserts that "*a* knows the meaning of *p* if-and-only-if *a* knows how to verify *p*;" see Dancy (1985) 87. To insist that a claim is meaningful if-and-only-if it is conclusively verifiable imposes unrealistic limitations. Many statements cannot be conclusively verified, including most historical testimony (e.g., "R. Akiba said: It is sacred"), most of our everyday statements (e.g., "Yesterday I had tea"), and even Neusner's own assertion ("What we cannot show we do not know"). Thus, Neusner's claim is ultimately self-defeating and his skepticism cannot be sustained.

[128] Neusner (1994) 15 gives several helpful criteria for rejecting an attribution, such as when the rabbinic literature inconsistently assigns the same saying to different rabbis and when contradictory statements are assigned to the same rabbi.

Jerusalem (70 C.E.) and the compilation of the Mishnah (ca. 200 C.E.)[129] and this overlaps with, or at least comes close to, a late first-century dating of FG. The Tannaitic literature to consider would be the Mishnah, Tosefta, and Tannaitic midrashim (Mek. R. Ishmael, Sifra on Leviticus, Sifré on Numbers and Sifré on Deuteronomy).[130] This would rule out, however, all the material cited by Strack-Billerbeck in their treatment of Jn 10:33 and a large portion of the sayings cited in connection to Matt 26:65.

2.2 A. E. Harvey (1976)

2.2.1 The *trials* of Jesus

Harvey is the only scholar who has written a monograph that directly addresses the issue of blasphemy in FG.[131] His sustained argument is that "it is possible to understand the Fourth Gospel as a presentation of the claims of Jesus in the form of an extended *trial*."[132] FG appears to be cast in the form of a trial reflecting a *ribh*-pattern, a literary genre that presents issues in the form of a lawsuit, which can be observed in certain OT passages.[133] Under OT law, formal courts were not always necessary to bring an accused person to justice. Whenever three competent persons were available to hear and judge a case, an impromptu trial could convene.[134] Similarly, FG portrays Jesus engaged in a number of conflicts or, as it were, *impromptu trials* where he defends himself against the charges of either Sabbath breaking or blasphemy.[135] Harvey finds five instances where Jesus is *on trial* for blasphemy, with four of the five reflecting the same three-fold pattern: blasphemous

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[129] We are persuaded by E. P. Sanders (1977) 60 who accepts the Tannaitic literature as an accurate account of the rabbinic discussions from 70-200 C.E.

[130] Cf. E. P. Sanders (1977) 59-60.

[131] In addition to Harvey's monograph, the only work specifically on blasphemy in FG is O'Neill (1995a) 50-61; cf. § 2.5. There are a number of works that are seemingly concerned with blasphemy in FG, but are generally less focused on blasphemy itself and more concerned with, for example, the exegetical puzzle that presents itself with the citation of Psa 82 in Jn 10:34; e.g., Menken (1996) 367-93, Schuchard (1992) 59-70, VanderKam (1990) 203-214, W. G. Phillips (1989) 405-19.

[132] Harvey (1976) 17; cf. 123-4, 126-7. Other scholars also emphasize the forensic nature of FG, including: Preiss (1957) 9-31; Dodd (1963) 88-92; J. Blank (1964) *passim*; Brown (1970) 2.834; Trites (1977) 78-127; Robinson (1985) 245-54; Borgen (1986) 67-78; Ashton (1991) 220-32, 523-27; Lincoln (1994) 3-30; Neyrey (1994) 77-91.

[133] Harvey (1976) 16-17, esp. n. 30; cf. Deut 32, Isa 1, Jer 2, Mic 6, Psa 50, and Job.

[134] Harvey (1976) 46-9; cf. Deut 19:12; 22:18-19; 25:7-9.

[135] Harvey (1976) 51 highlights the trial-like nature of Johannine conflicts by arguing that Jesus was, in fact, "prosecuted" (διώκειν) in Jn 5:16.

words by Jesus, an attempt to seize or punish him, an escape by Jesus.[136] Jesus not only defends himself, he also comes to make a claim as God's Agent (= God's Son), which is also challenged as blasphemous.[137]

However, Harvey, like others, notes that there is an inconsistency between what FG understands as blasphemy—Jesus' claim to be God's Agent or Son—and "the only definition known to us of the offence of blasphemy (M. Sanh. 7.5) [which] makes it clear that ... it was necessary for the blasphemer to have pronounced the Divine Name."[138] This rabbinic definition is based on a specific interpretation of Lev 24:15-16:

> 15b Whoever cursed God, shall bear his sin.
> 16 He who blasphemes the name of the Lord shall be put to death.[139]

The two verses may have originally referred to the same offense.[140] However, the rabbis distinguished the two. The first clause referred to using abusive language against God, which God himself would punish.[141] The second referred to a different offense—vocalizing the Name or "naming the Name" (LXX Lev 24:16)—that of blasphemy itself, which required people to execute the offender by stoning.[142] The rabbinic interpretation, however, was by no means the only one. The writings of Josephus and Philo show that blasphemy against God could be more broadly understood and that blasphemy need not entail vocalization of the Name.[143] Thus, Harvey believes that FG's understanding of blasphemy is historically plausible.

2.2.2 The *trials* of early Christians

Harvey, like Martyn, recognizes that "the Gospel is written on two levels at once."[144] Harvey argues that the disciples (at the second level) continue to experience the trial of Jesus (at the first level) whenever "Jesus' claim to be Son of God and Messiah is

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[136] Jn 5:16-18; 7:28-30; 8:19 (seems to be an exception); 8:59; 10:30-38; Harvey (1976) 51-3 and 58-9.
[137] Harvey (1976) 88-92, 95-98; Harvey (1987) 239-50.
[138] Harvey (1976) 77.
[139] Harvey's translation (1976) 77.
[140] Harvey (1976) 77.
[141] *B. Ker 7b.*
[142] *b. Sanh.* 7.5
[143] Harvey (1976) 78-80.
[144] Harvey (1976) 82; cf. Martyn (1979).

denied by the enemies of the Christian community."[145] The advocacy of the *paraclete* on behalf of the community (14:26; 15:26; 16:7-15) as well as the commission of the disciples as *agents* of the Son (13:16, 20; 20:23) is evidence that *Jesus' trial continues in the life of his disciples.* It follows that "any particular occasion on which a disciple is actually brought to trial is only an instance and continuation of that eternal 'trial' in which, first Jesus, and then his followers, are inevitably involved before the judgment of the world."[146]

2.2.3 Evaluation

Rightly, Harvey places the issue of blasphemy at the center of the Johannine agenda. Set within the ebb and flow of the extended trial narrative, the charge of blasphemy is the counter claim, or flip side, to Jesus' claim to be God's Agent, the Son and the Messiah. The christological claim and the counter claim of blasphemy are inseparably fused in FG. One illuminates the other. No one has provided a clearer vision of this than Harvey. What he fails to provide, however, is an adequate definition or description of blasphemy based on early Jewish literature. Several times he simply assumes that a false claim to speak or act for God is blasphemous.[147] Why it is blasphemous is not explained. In his treatment of Philo and Josephus, he never answers his own question of "what did this capital offence of blaspheming consist of?"[148] except for a brief footnote to Derrett where the Greek *blasphēmia* is said to represent the Hebrew *y^{e}kallel*—"any utterance diminishing the honour of God."[149] While Harvey takes pains to show that FG's conception of blasphemy need not entail vocalizing the Name, he neglects to demonstrate what precisely was blasphemous in FG. Part II of this thesis seeks to address that neglected factor.

In addition, Harvey persuasively argues that at one level the long, drawn-out *trial* of Jesus, in which the FG was cast, illuminates the life of early Christians at a second level. The extended *trial* of Jesus functions analogically: Just as Jesus is God's Agent and is put *on trial* for claiming to be God's Son, so also Jesus' disciples are Jesus'

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[145] Harvey (1976) 112-21, esp. 113.
[146] Harvey (1976) 115.
[147] Harvey (1976) 83.
[148] Harvey (1976) 79.
[149] Harvey (1976) 79, n. 36 citing Derrett, *Law in the New Testament,* 454.

agents and must endure prosecution for their christological confessions. Although Harvey states that early Christians expected to appear on trial for their faith, he never develops what charges they might have faced nor how that might have influenced early Christian self-understanding and the inevitable parting of the ways between Jews and Christians. Nevertheless, and crucially, Harvey's analogy suggests that early Christians faced the charge of blasphemy. On what grounds early Christians could have been charged with blasphemy will be discussed in Part III of this thesis.

2.3 E. P. Sanders (1985, 1990, and 1993)

Although E. P. Sanders does not provide a monograph on blasphemy, three of his works should be considered here.[150] Not only does he argue that a correct view of blasphemy is essential for an accurate portrait of the historical Jesus, significant in itself, but he also raises critical issues about what constitutes blasphemy and whose experiences of blasphemy—Jesus' or early Christians'—are reflected in the Gospel accounts.

2.3.1 The *cause* of Jesus' death

In *Jesus and Judaism* (1985), Sanders presents an analysis of Jesus' intention, his relationship to Judaism, and the causes of his death. *The Historical Figure of Jesus* (1993) offers a similar, but broader portrait of Jesus, whereas *Jewish Law From Jesus to the Mishnah* (1990) buttresses his earlier position on Jesus' relation to the law, which includes a section on blasphemy.

When dealing with Jesus' death, Sanders argues that there are two firm facts: "Jesus was executed by Romans as a would-be 'king of the Jews' and his disciples subsequently formed a messianic community which was not based on the hope of military victory."[151] The difficulty lies in explaining, on the one hand, why the Romans thought Jesus was enough of a threat to execute and, on the other, why his followers were not rounded up and executed also. According to Sanders, Jesus believed that God was on the verge of bringing about the long awaited restoration of

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[150] E. P. Sanders (1985, 1990, and 1993).
[151] E. P. Sanders (1985) 294.

Israel and, as part of that restoration, the old Temple would be replaced with a new one. Jesus saw his own work as part of that drama and so spoke against the Temple and enacted its symbolic destruction (cf. Mk 11:12-19 and para.). This led almost immediately to Jesus' arrest and execution because it alarmed the priests who were concerned about potential rioting and other political and moral consequences. The chief priests, therefore, persuaded Pilate to execute Jesus as a troublemaker. His talk of a kingdom and the gathering he attracted was enough to convince the Romans. As far as the priests were concerned, Jesus' claim to speak for God, his healings, and his announcement that *sinners* would be in the kingdom[152] annoyed them and cocked the gun, "but it was the temple demonstration which pulled the trigger."[153] Hence, the primary conflict was between Jesus and the priests and so Jesus' followers were not summarily arrested and executed by the Romans.[154]

Thus, Sanders is convinced that Jesus' demonstration in the Temple is *sufficient* to account for Jesus' execution but, more than that, it is also a more *satisfying* explanation when compared to the charge of blasphemy.[155] One of Sanders' main contentions is that Jesus' disputes over the law were not substantial, including the dispute surrounding the charge of blasphemy, and so they do not provide an adequate explanation or legal basis for his death.[156] This line of reasoning becomes clear in his examination of the following key accounts of blasphemy.

First, Sanders does not find the evidence for blasphemy in Mk 2:5-7 compelling.[157] In this account, it is usually thought that Jesus is accused of blasphemy for forgiving sins but, according to Sanders, it is not what it seems. Since Jesus speaks in the passive voice, he is not claiming to forgive sins himself; rather, Jesus is announcing God's forgiveness. There is nothing blasphemous about such an announcement by any known Jewish law or interpretation. Nevertheless, Sanders grants that someone

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[152] E. P. Sanders (1985) 174-221 argues that the 'sinners' (Heb. *resha' im*; Gk. *hamartōloi*) are not to be equated with the *'amme ha 'arets*, but with "professional sinners" or "the wicked" who do not repent.

[153] E. P. Sanders (1985) 305.

[154] E. P. Sanders (1985) 318.

[155] *Sufficient* and *satisfying* are my terms; see Sanders (1985) 296-306 and (1993) 269-73.

[156] E. P. Sanders (1990) 1-96 discusses the disputes concerning Sabbath, food, purity offerings, tithes, temple tax, oaths and vows, blasphemy, worship, and fasting.

making such a pronouncement could seem arrogant, and "arrogance and great presumption before God can be considered blasphemy."[158] Still, Sanders dismisses the charge in Mk 2:5-7 as "extremely weak" since Jesus is not portrayed as displaying the type of taunting presumption that denigrates God (e.g., LXX Ezek 35:13).[159] Sanders suggests that the account is a *retrojection* of a later Christian dispute back into the early ministry of Jesus.[160]

Second, Sanders argues that the basis for blasphemy—the use of the titles 'Messiah,' 'Son of God' or 'Son of Man' (Mk 14:61-64; Matt 26:63-66)—in the so-called 'trial narratives' is less than convincing.[161] Even if the trial narratives did not conflict with each other,[162] there is no evidence that using such titles, in and of themselves, constituted blasphemy.[163] Nothing in Judaism indicates that a claim to be the 'Christ' or 'Messiah' was blasphemous.[164] Nothing in the passage suggests that when Jesus said, "I am," it was understood to mean *ani hu*, God's self-identification in the Hebrew Bible, which would have been blasphemous.[165] Nor is there anything particularly blasphemous about the use of the term 'son of God,' which any Jew could claim. On this point, however, Sanders concedes that it could have been blasphemous "if Jesus claimed to be God's *special* son, and if Jesus was regarded as a false spokesman, God would be implicitly denigrated."[166] Although Sanders rejects the idea that Jesus used *filial-language* in this way, he states that Christians may have used the term *Son* in an exalted way and, in turn, this may have provoked the charge of blasphemy against Christians.

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[157] E. P. Sanders (1985) 273; (1990) 63; (1993) 273, 301.

[158] E. P. Sanders (1990) 62-3.

[159] E. P. Sanders (1990) 63.

[160] E. P. Sanders (1985) 273 and (1993) 214, 216.

[161] E. P. Sanders (1986) 297-8 and (1993) 270-1.

[162] E. P. Sanders (1993) 269 thinks that the trial narratives are accurate in general, but conflict in detail and therefore do not allow for an accurate reconstruction of specifics.

[163] E. P. Sanders (1985) 298. In his later work, Sanders (1993) 270 argues that it looks like the product of Christian creativity and that "some early Christians wanted to attribute his death to confessing the christology of the church."

[164] E. P. Sanders (1990) 64.

[165] E. P. Sanders (1990) 65 arguing against Stauffer (1960).

[166] E. P. Sanders (1990) 64, his emphasis.

> Jesus was thought to be the Messiah and *the* Son of God in some very special way. Thus *Christians* might have been accused by Jews of blasphemy.... The accusation 'blasphemy' is a reasonable Jewish response to Christian thought about Jesus.[167]

Finally, Sanders states that "blasphemy is a conceivable response to the Son of man saying" (Mk 14:62), though it would require that the high priest interpret it in a way that denigrated God.[168] However, he insists that blasphemy is not obvious from simply reading the passage and so even the 'Son of Man' text must be ruled as "not probable."[169]

In three of his monographs, Sanders consistently argues that it was Jesus' demonstration in the Temple led to his execution and not the charge of blasphemy as depicted by the Gospels. In the trial narratives, the evangelists tend to minimize the witnesses' testimony that Jesus threatened the Temple (Mk 14:57-59; Mt 59-61)[170] because they wanted Jesus to be condemned for making a christological confession.[171]

2.3.2 Evaluation

When Sanders argues that Jesus' demonstration in the Temple pulled the 'trigger' that resulted in his execution—since it was the last public event before his life was terminated—he employs the fallacy argument known as *post hoc, ergo propter hoc*, "after this, therefore because this."[172] As such, his argument is possible, but *not compelling*. Nevertheless, once Sanders deems that the Temple demonstration is a sufficient cause for the death of Jesus, he takes pains to show the improbability of the charge of blasphemy. However, at almost every turn, Sanders comments that *if* certain circumstances had been present, *if* a certain attitude had been displayed, *if* the high priest had interpreted Jesus in *this* way, then blasphemy would be "conceivable." Thus, Sanders is inconsistent. He acknowledges that blasphemy

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[167] E. P. Sanders (1990) 64.

[168] E. P. Sanders (1990) 65, 67.

[169] E. P. Sanders (1990) 67.

[170] E. P. Sanders (1985) 301 states Jesus' threat to the Temple was "swept under the rug by Matthew and Mark, and omitted by Luke." Even though Mark indicates that it was the decisive action in the plot to kill Jesus (Mk 11:18), it resulted in confused testimony (Matt 26:59-61; Mk 14:57-59), misunderstanding (Jn 2:19-21) or was reinterpreted as a prediction (Mk 13:2).

[171] E. P. Sanders (1985) 298; (1990) 66; (1993) 270.

[172] E. P. Sanders (1985) 302 recognizes this difficulty, but ignores it

involves certain attitudes (such as arrogance, great presumption, or taunting God) or certain interpretations (such as the high priest's), yet he will only acknowledge the existence of blasphemy on the basis of certain textual artifacts (such as titles) which, in and of themselves, do not disclose attitudes or interpretations. Furthermore, it is ironic that after some effort to brush blasphemy out of the picture as a cause of Jesus death, he paints it back in when he says that "attacking the temple, even by a minor symbolic gesture, might have been seen as denigrating and thus blaspheming God."[173]

Sanders' treatment raises the question of *where is blasphemy to be found*? Is it found in the utterance of certain words, phrases, or titles? Or is it found in the unique configuration of certain verbal expressions, discourse circumstances, intentionality, and nuances of speech and gesture as Sanders recognizes, but seems to ignore? The question of where blasphemy is found will be addressed in Part II.

Sanders also raises the question of *whether Christians themselves, in the late first-century, were being accused of blasphemy.* He assumes that they probably were, if they were using the christological confessions expressed by the evangelists. However, he provides no evidence or argumentation and leaves his insightful observation undeveloped. The question of whether Christians—specifically those who read, embraced, and propagated the theology of FG—were accused of blasphemy will be addressed in Part III.

2.4 Raymond Brown (1994)

As part of his treatise on *The Death of the Messiah,* Brown presents a four-part examination of the historicity of the Sanhedrin proceedings against Jesus and follows that with an analysis of the main charge against Jesus, the charge of blasphemy.[174] We will review and comment on his discussions dealing with the nature of blasphemy, the Sanhedrin judgment, and the charge of blasphemy.

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[173] E. P. Sanders (1990) 67 and also see (1985) 298.
[174] Brown (1993) 1.520-47.

2.4.1 The nature of blasphemy

Brown asks what constituted blasphemy in the first century and, in particular, whether blasphemy entailed saying the divine name. He argues that key OT texts (like Lev. 24:16 and Num 15:30) are ambiguous and that later rabbinic sources, while attempting to clarify what constituted blasphemy, were not in agreement. Some rabbinic sources required an inappropriate vocalization of the divine name (*m. Sanh.* 7.5), while others argue that no vocalization was necessary (*t. Sanh.* 1.2, *Sifra* Deut 21:22 [#221], *b. Sanh.* 56a). In contrast, texts written in Greek by Jews are much clearer. On the basis of the LXX, Philo, and Josephus, Brown observes that "naming the Name" is distinguished from instances when *blasphēm*-root words are used.[175] When *blasphēm*-root words are used of God, it involved insulting or demeaning God in word or deed.[176] Hence, Brown argues that there is no reason to assume that first-century readers of the Gospels would have thought that the charge of blasphemy would have meant that Jesus "named the Name."[177] However, Brown may be premature in insisting that we can now drop the question of whether Jesus mentioned YHWH.[178] While he has demonstrated that in the Greek pre-Gospel traditions *blasphēmein* did not refer to naming the Name, he has not dealt with Hebrew or Aramaic traditions.

Next, Brown argues that, from the perspective of the evangelists, Jesus was accused of blasphemy on the basis of three types of claims: (a) claims to be the Son of God or an exalted Son of Man, (b) claims to destroy the Temple or the holy place, and (c) claims to change the Mosaic Law.[179] Each of these provoke an accusation of blasphemy against Jesus and the early Christians (at least this is the perception of the evangelists). For each of these, there are corresponding counter-charges of blasphemy against non-believing Jews.[180] What we see is "two separate communities, each

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[175] The clearest example is Philo's insistence that blasphemy is worse than uttering God's name unseasonably; see *De vita Moses* 2:38 (#206); cf. *De decalogo* 19 (#93).

[176] Brown (1993) 522.

[177] Brown (1993) 523.

[178] Brown (1993) 531.

[179] Brown (1993) 524-6.

[180] Brown (1993) 524-7 identifies the blasphemous mocking of Jesus (Lk 22:64), the blasphemy of the Holy Spirit (Mk 3:29), the blasphemous ridicule of Jesus for his claim about the Temple (Mk 15:29), and the Christian judgment that the destruction of the Temple was God's judgment on unbelieving Jews.

passionate for the honor of the God of Israel and each seeing the other as blaspheming because of the way they understood Jesus."[181] Despite minor differences among the Gospel accounts, Brown thinks that they "give almost the same picture of the charge of blasphemy against Jesus."[182] They tell their readers that non-believing Jews thought what Christians proclaimed about Jesus was blasphemous—Christians insulted God—because they elevated Jesus and claimed for him what belonged to God alone.

2.4.2 The Sanhedrin judgment

There is some dispute regarding whether the "Jewish trial narratives" in the Gospels portray a condemnation of Jesus. Some argue that, at most, the Sanhedrin is shown rendering a legal opinion, but not a condemnation of Jesus. For example, Luke's account fails to mention the charge of blasphemy and Matthew's does not use the verb *katakrinein*. Rightly, Brown is not convinced. There is convincing evidence that what the evangelists intended to depict (which he distinguishes from what happened historically[183]) was the Jewish authorities' passing of the death sentence on Jesus, not merely rendering a opinion. The evangelists' description of the summoning of the Sanhedrin, the calling of witnesses, getting an admission from Jesus, tearing garments, and using the phrase *enochos thanatou* in Mt 26:66 and Mk 14:64,[184] indicate that more was at stake than rendering an opinion. "Thus, in the last third of the century the evangelists, who knew perfectly well that the Romans sentenced and crucified Jesus, were sharing with their readers the view that the Jewish Sanhedrin also decided on Jesus' death."[185]

2.4.3 The charge of blasphemy

Brown deals with three main objections to or problems with the historicity of the charge of blasphemy. The first alleged problem stems from Lev 24:16, which specifies stoning for blasphemers, not crucifixion. Because Jesus was crucified or "hung," he could not have been convicted of blasphemy, or so the argument goes. In

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[181] Brown (1993) 527.
[182] Brown (1993) 526.
[183] Brown (1993) 529 makes this distinction without elaboration.
[184] Brown (1993) 529 translates *enochos thanatou* as "guilty, to be punished by death."
[185] Brown (1993) 530.

response, Brown shows that the "no stoning, no blasphemy" argument is very weak.[186] A major factor to consider is that Jesus, unlike Stephen (Acts 6:11, 14), was turned over to the Romans who determined the type of execution. Beyond that, Brown demonstrates that even among Jews there was a range of death penalties, including hanging, that could be invoked for blasphemy and similar crimes (e.g., 11 Q *Temple* 64:7-13; cf. Deut. 21:22-23).

Another objection to the historicity of the blasphemy charge is that nothing raised about Jesus during the trial was itself blasphemous. Brown, as it were, answers a series of questions to this objection. Would a claim to be the Messiah have been viewed as blasphemous? No. There is "no real evidence" that such a claim would have been seen as blasphemous.[187] In fact, Brown does not believe that Jesus ever used the title for himself, publicly or privately. What about a claim to be the Son of God? No. It is unlikely that either Jesus or his followers applied the title to him during his lifetime. Would a claim to be the Son of Man have provoked a charge of blasphemy? Possibly. Brown writes, "Of the three Marcan titles mentioned at the trial, in my judgment only this one is favored by the evidence as having been used by Jesus himself in his lifetime."[188] If this title was understood in light of the exaltation passages in the OT (Ps 110; Dan 7:14; Isa 14:13-14; etc.), then Brown believes that it is possible that Jesus' use of it could have been considered blasphemous. What about the allegation that Jesus threatened the Temple? Possibly. The Gospel tradition does associate Jesus with criticism of the Temple (Mt 12:6, 8; 26:65; Mk 15:29; 11:48; Acts 6:11, 13-14), exalting himself above the Temple (Mt 12:6, 8), and symbolically cleansing it and speaking prophetically about its destruction (Mk 11:2-19 and para.). Brown cites about ten instances outside the Gospels where criticism of the Temple or threats to it brought violent reactions, not only by the Jews but sometimes by the Romans.[189] Cautiously, Brown comments that none of the instances he cites brought the charge of blasphemy.[190] Is it possible that Jesus was accused of blasphemy for

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[186] Brown (1993) 532-4.
[187] Brown (1993) 534.
[188] Brown (1993) 536.
[189] Brown (1993) 539-40.
[190] However, he overlooks a number of texts that link various threats to the Temple with blasphemy (see chapter 16).

being a false prophet? In a word, yes. Brown thinks that the evidence from the gospels is mixed; the evangelists show others acknowledging Jesus as a/the prophet, but it is less clear whether Jesus assigned himself that role. Nevertheless, in light of the warning against false prophets in Deut 13:2-6 and 18:20-22 and in conjunction with many examples of would-be prophets during Jesus' century (but no would-be Messiahs, Sons of God, or Sons of Man), Brown believes that the main blasphemous charge against Jesus was that he was a false prophet, even though the evidence falls short of establishing it.[191]

A third issue regarding the historicity of the charge of blasphemy concerns Jesus' ministry as a whole. In an insightful move, Brown goes beyond the trial narrative, where the *official* charge is heard. He comments that the trial "is phrased in light of later Christian experience," couched in the confessional language of christological titles, so that in the trial "we are hearing how Christians in the last third of the 1st cent. understood Jewish adversaries who considered Christian claims about Jesus to be blasphemous."[192] In the eyes of the Christians, their Jewish opponents thought that the exaltation of Jesus as Messiah, Son of God, and Son of Man was blasphemous. Brown surmises that if we want to know whether Jesus was considered a blasphemer during his lifetime, we have to go beyond the trial narratives. He lists (with little comment) nine things that Jesus said or did that could have been considered religiously arrogant or presumptuous and therefore blasphemous.[193] Jesus' provocations included:

- teaching with an authoritative "Amen,"
- claiming to forgive sins,
- doing extraordinary deeds which he claimed manifested God's Kingdom,
- telling people that they would be judged by how they reacted to him,
- claiming authority over the Law,
- demonstrating criticism of Temple customs,
- assuming his authority depended on who he was,
- addressing God with the familiar "Abba,"
- speaking of himself as the son of God

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[191] Brown (1993) 541-44. However, N.T. Wright (1996) 145-474 presents good evidence and argumentation that Jesus fits "the profile of a prophet."

[192] Brown (1993) 544.

[193] Brown (1993) 545-7.

2.4.4 Evaluation

Brown's study is significant for at least three reasons. First, he is sensitive to the possibility that the post-70s experience of Christians vividly colored their portrayal of Jesus' pre-30s trial and the charge of blasphemy. Second, his understanding of blasphemy—*an arrogant claim to have the status or privileges that belong to God alone and so insult God*[194]—is much broader than the definitions of blasphemy culled from OT and rabbinic *juridical* texts.[195] This allows him to assert that late first century Christians themselves could have been accused of blasphemy for their arrogant and unabashed exaltation of Jesus. Third, Brown broadens the issue of blasphemy beyond the motifs usually associated with Jesus at the trial. Although he does not elaborate, Brown lists *non-trial* traditions that could have provoked a charge of blasphemy by unbelieving Jews.[196] Part III of this thesis will investigate several motifs developed by FG that could have provoked the charge of blasphemy against Johannine Christians.[197]

2.5 John O'Neill (1995)

2.5.1 Jesus' claim to be Messiah

In an article examining the issue of blasphemy in Jn 5:17-18, O'Neill asks whether *the Jews* in this text thought Jesus was challenging monotheism. He concludes, "there is no good evidence in John's Gospel itself that Jesus' opponents thought that he was infringing [*sic.* on] Jewish monotheism."[198] O'Neill's argument is unique and, on the surface, appears to have some force. First, he argues that Jesus claims to be the Messiah, a special Son of the Father, when he calls God, *my* Father in Jn 5:17. Second, he argues that, in accord with 2 Sam 7:14 and Psalm 2 (cf. 4Q 246 and 1Qsa 2.11), the *Son of God* was a contemporary title synonymous with *Messiah.* The use of these titles was not blasphemous in itself, rather it was Jesus' *self-acclaim* to be God's Messiah that brought the charge in Jn 5:18. According to O'Neill, "no human

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[194] This is my paraphrase of Brown's position (1993) 523, 531, and 547.

[195] E.g., Ex. 22:28; *m. Sanh* 7:5.

[196] This strengthens his case that Jesus was probably accused of blasphemy without relying on the trial narratives, which show later Christian influences.

[197] By "Johannine Christians" I mean those who wrote, preserved, and promoted FG in the late first century.

[198] O'Neill (1995a) 50-61, esp. 51.

being was allowed to say that he was himself the Messiah."[199] To the identify the Messiah was God's prerogative alone, and anyone who made such a claim was "making himself equal with God" and thereby blaspheming (Jn 5:18).[200] That Jesus was accused of blasphemy because of some sort of atrocious boast of self-assertion comes to the fore in Jn 19:7 and 19:21. Both verses depict *the Jews* accusing Jesus of claiming to be *the Son of God* (19:7) and *the king of the Jews* (19:21). Thus, according to O'Neill, Jesus is charged with blasphemy, not for making himself equal to God in all respects, but in only one respect, that of claiming to be the Messiah.

To further support this interpretation, O'Neill turns to Jn 10:34-36 and contends that it should be read in light of Psa 82 and 11QMelch. When all three texts are compared—and their redaction taken into consideration[201]—two outcomes follow: (a) Jn 10:34 becomes a scriptural argument that the Messiah could be called *God* which, rather surprisingly, O'Neill says, "did not originally bear on the matter in hand, Jesus' defense against the charge of blasphemy."[202] (b) Jn 10:36 is "an accurate statement of what Jesus was tried for," that is, that Jesus claimed to be *the Son of God*, the Messiah.[203]

For O'Neill, the issue of blasphemy in FG does not concern an infringement on monotheism—speaking about the Messiah as God, as O'Neill argues that Jn 33:34 and 11QMelch do, assumes a living Jewish tradition that does not threaten the belief that *God is one*. Rather, the issue of blasphemy in FG concerns an infringement on God's prerogative *to identify* the Messiah, which was daringly and blasphemously usurped by Jesus when he identified himself as such.

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[199] O'Neill (1995a) 54-5.

[200] In another work, O'Neill (1995b) 48, 53 states that Jesus' self-acclaim was a *capital crime*, because it violated the warning against false prophecy in Deut 13:5 (cf. *m Sanh* 11:5).

[201] O'Neill (1995a) 57 is less than convincing when he surgically removes Jn 10:35a because it is a "senseless gloss." Nor is he convincing when he follows late manuscript tradition (Tatian, Old Latin, a b ff^2 l r and 472) and reads 10:36 as "he blasphemes" and "he said," rather than "you blaspheme" and "I said."

[202] O'Neill (1995a) 57.

[203] O'Neill (1995a) 58.

2.5.2 Evaluation

One of O'Neill's main points should be accepted: Jesus was accused of blasphemy on the basis of what appeared to be some sort of self-acclaim. Although O'Neill only cites a few texts to support this (Jn 5:18; 19:7, 21) other texts may be added (Jn 5:19, 30; 8:28b-c, 53; 10:33; 19:7), pointing to a cluster of passages that form what may be called a *self-assertion or self-exaltation theme* in FG.

What Jesus was asserting or claiming for himself, however, is less clear. O'Neill falls short of supplying an answer, since he adduces no evidence for his crucial statement that "no human being was allowed to say that he was himself the Messiah." O'Neill rather off-handedly refers to Matt 24:36 and Mk 13:32, but these verses concern the *time* of the coming of the Son of Man, not who has the right to *identify* the Messiah. To be fair, in another work, O'Neill cites examples from Josephus where messianic claimants do not directly *say* they are the Messiah. However, this does not help, since it is an argument from silence and since the claimants mentioned by Josephus actually take *actions* that indicate their messianic status, from putting on a crown to wearing royal robes to accepting the title of *king*.[204] While O'Neill's particular argument about Jesus' messianic claim fails, the question of whether a messianic claim, under certain circumstances, could be seen as blasphemous is still open.

Lastly, O'Neill neglects to acknowledge the debate regarding the translation and interpretation of 4Q246 and 1QSa 2.11, and simply assumes that they indicate that *the Son of God* was synonymous with *the Messiah*.[205] On the other hand, O'Neill's citation of 11 QMelch regarding the identification of a Messiah-like figure as *God*, calls into question the modern notion that monotheism concerns numerical oneness. However, it is another thing to say, as O'Neill does, that Jn 10:34 must be read in the

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[204] O'Neill (1995b) 42-54.

[205] O'Neill (1995a) 53. First, which Hebrew word is represented in 1QSa 2.11 is debated. If it is *yolid*, then the phrase is "when God *engenders* (the Priest-) Messiah" (Vermes) or "when God *begets* the Messiah" (Garcia-Martínez). If the word is *yitgalleh*, then the phrase becomes "God *reveals* the Messiah" (Puech). See Vermes (1997) 159; Garcia-Martínez (1996) 127; Puech (1994) 361. Second, to whom *the son of God* refers in 4Q 246 is contended. Does it refer to a Seleucid ruler, Alexander Balas (Milik), to a Jewish, Hasmonaean, King (Fitzmyer) to an apocalyptic Antichrist figure (Flusser), to an angelic figure like Michael (García-Martínez), or to historico-apocalyptic sovereign who proclaims himself and demands to be worshiped (Vermes)? See Vermes (1997) 576-7.

light of 11QMelch and that the Johannine Jesus did not threaten monotheism without further evidence from FG itself.

2.6 Darrell L. Bock (1998 and 2000)

2.6.1 The first major study of blasphemy

Bock provides the first major study on the meaning, scope, and significance of blasphemy in early Judaism and, along with a study on exalted figures, uses it to assess the historicity of the *trial* (Bock prefers *examination*) of Jesus in Mark's Gospel.[206] Since the focus of his book overlaps significantly the interest of this thesis, we will interact with Bock throughout the thesis. Nevertheless, a brief overview of Bock's work is warranted here.

Bock's work is divided into four parts. In Part I, Bock reviews current scholarship that pertains to blasphemy and concludes by noting that Ps 110:1 and Dan 7:13, which focus on exalted figures, have been repeatedly viewed as key texts for understanding the issue of blasphemy in the examination or trial of Jesus.

Part II provides the most thorough analysis on blasphemy in early Judaism to date. Bock selects more than 100 texts and organizes them into eleven categories: Hebrew Scriptures, Qumran, the Septuagint, the Pseudepigrapha, Josephus, Philo, the Mishnah and Tosefta, the Targums, the Midrashim, the Palestinian Talmud, and the Babylonian Talmud and Aboth de Rabbi Nathan. Each section begins by identifying key terminology that belong to the semantic field of blasphemy for that particular category. So, for example, the terms חדף, קלל, חרף, נאץ, נקב, לעג, and ברך are identified as key terms for the Hebrew Scriptures and גדף, נאע, and קלל are identified as key terms for Qumran literature. Each section also ends with a brief summary of his findings. Bock's conclusion, for which he provides ample evidence, is that blasphemy may be *verbal* or *non-verbal*[207] and primarily involves insulting or

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[206] The content and pagination of Bock (1998), published with Mohr Siebeck, is identical with Bock (2000), published with Baker. Also see the earlier article by Bock (1994) 181-91.

[207] Bock (1998) 35, 44-46, 49-50 argues that the verbal aspect is primary (e.g., Ex 22:27; 1QS4.11; 1QS7.1), but there is evidence for non-verbal blasphemy in the form of attitudes and actions (e.g., CD 5.12; 1 Macc 2:6; 2 Macc 8:4, 9:28, 15:24)

dishonoring God and, secondarily, insulting or dishonoring God's people, leaders, Temple, or law.

Part III investigates early Jewish perceptions regarding exaltation and heavenly access to God which, together with Part II, become a two-pronged approach for discussing the accusation of blasphemy in Mark's *examination* of Jesus. Bock argues that the charge of blasphemy is significant for both Mark's narrative as a whole and for his pastoral purposes. On the narrative level, the combination of Mk 2:7 and 3:29 sets up a "battle of blasphemies" that reaches a climax in the *examination* narrative with a charge of blasphemy against Jesus (14:64) and a counter-charge of blasphemy against onlookers insulting Jesus (15:29).[208] The pastoral function was to encourage readers to have confidence in their own confessions of Jesus since Jesus is exonerated by the implied resurrection (Mk 16:6-7). Then, in concord with Otto Betz,[209] Bock argues that the Markan *examination* scene should be viewed as a "preliminary hearing" and should not be judged by the standards of a formal trial.[210] Third, in response to those who argue that it is hard to imagine that the disciples got information about the *examination* of Jesus, since they were not present,[211] Bock contends that a chain of information about the *examination* could have reached the disciples and, what is more, it is hard to imagine that the Jewish position on Jesus was kept secret and never made public.[212] Lastly, Bock argues that the charge of blasphemy against Jesus was not based on misusing the Name,[213] but on his reply that alluded to Ps 110:1 ("sitting at God's right hand") and Dan 7:13 ("they will see the

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[208] Bock (1998) 188. Unfortunately, Bock does not elaborate on how the "battle of blasphemies" may have addressed pastoral needs of Mark's audience. However, Anderson (1986) 107-25 argues that the tit-for-tat allegations of blasphemy functioned in an environment where Christians were facing trials themselves. The accusation of blasphemy against Jesus (Mk 2:7, 14:64) was "Mark's characterization of Jewish anti-Christian polemic"(118) and the unpardonable blasphemy against the Holy Spirit (Mk 3:29) was the Christian counter-charge against non-believing Jews (109).

[209] Betz (1992) 87-8.

[210] *Contra* Lohse (1973) 97-7 and Reinbold (1994) 252, Bock (1998) 190-5 argues that Mk 14:53-65 should be viewed as a preliminary hearing for four reasons: (a) the statement ἔνοχον εἶναι θανάτου in Mk 14:64 functions as an opinion to pass on to Rome, not a formal legal verdict; (b) the weakness of the temple charge in Mk 14:55-59; (c) the lack of a defense; and (d) earlier efforts to trap Jesus (e.g., Mk 12:12-13) were attempts to gather evidence to convince Rome that Jesus was a political threat.

[211] E.g., E. P. Sanders (1985) 298.

[212] Bock (1998) 195-7.

[213] Bock (1998) 197-200, which is *contra* Gundry (1993) 915-18.

Son of Man coming on the clouds").[214] On the one hand, the allusions functioned as a self-claim to share in God's authority and to act as God's eschatological judge, both of which would have been viewed by the Jewish leadership as false and an arrogant affront to God.[215] On the other hand, the allusions might have recalled martyrdom language that indicated that the unrighteous (the Jewish leadership accusing Jesus) will see the vindication of the righteous (Jesus).[216] This would have been seen as an attack on the *divinely appointed* leadership of Israel, a violation of Ex 22:28, and thus blasphemous.[217]

2.6.2 Evaluation

Bock provides a plausible historical reading of the Markan *Jewish examination of Jesus* by carefully and thoughtfully engaging both the evidence and alternative opinions at every step. Furthermore, Bock should be praised for providing the first major study on blasphemy that, on the whole, is both adept and thorough. Whereas others have largely assumed what was meant by blasphemy, Bock offers fairly comprehensive evidence and cogent rationale for his decisions. On the basis of the material that he examines, his general conclusions regarding the nature of blasphemy can hardly be disputed.

Still, some weaknesses can be detected regarding his analysis and, for our purposes, his approach fails to bring out the discourse concepts of blasphemy that are helpful for probing FG. First, Bock's survey of texts omits any analysis of NT texts that, one assumes, provide the closest comparative literature to Mark's Gospel. Surely, without analysis of some NT texts, Bock's conclusions are uncertain. In contrast, our semantic analysis of blasphemy in chapter 4 is based on a comprehensive analysis of *blasphemy*-related terms from the NT and other early Jewish literature. Second, when surveying Greek literature, Bock primarily focuses on texts that use βλασφημεῖν,

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[214] Bock (1998) 5-29, esp. 26-9 argues that scholars have reached a consensus that the juxtaposition of Psa 110:1 and Dan 7:13 is the key to understanding the charge of blasphemy against Jesus in the Synoptic Gospels; see Evans (1995) 407-34, Hengel (1995) 185-9, Gundry (1993) 886, Catchpole (1971) 135-41, Blinzler (1969) 158-9.

[215] Bock (1998) 200-6 reasons that this would have been blasphemous according to Philo's *On Dreams* 2.130-31 and *Decalogue* 61-64 as well as by midrashim, like *ExodR* 8.2, 15.6, 21.3

[216] Bock (1998) 206-9 draws upon *Wis* 5.2, *ApocElijah* 5:28, and 1 *En* 62:3-5.

[217] Cf. 11QTemple 64:6-13.

βλάσφημος, and βλασφημία, though he mentions καταλαλεῖν, παραλαλεῖν, παροξύνειν, and παροργιζεῖν.[218] This overlooks other Greek terminology within the same semantic domain as βλασφημέω, such as διαβάλλω, δυσφημέω, ἐκβάλλω τὸ ὄνομα, κακολογέω, λοιδορέω, ὀνειδίζω, and ὑβρίζω.[219] Of course, the necessity of setting boundaries for research will always invite the criticism that a piece of research is *too* limited, as even our own semantic analysis is limited to five groups of terms. Third, Bock has included a large analysis of texts that date well after the NT period. Analysis of texts prior to or concurrent with NT writings occupies 37 pages,[220] whereas that of post-NT texts occupies 45 pages.[221] Granted, some of the post-NT texts may contain earlier traditions, but this emphasis is hard to justify when the NT is neglected. It is possible that this apparent imbalance may have been prompted by previous scholarship (e.g., Strack-Billerbeck) that, rather anachronistically, used the broad spectrum of rabbinic literature to illuminate the trial of Jesus in the Gospels. Fourth, as we have noted, Bock provides a survey of over 100 ancient Jewish texts on blasphemy. This means that no one particular text receives more than a cursory analysis. In contrast, in chapter 4 we not only summarize our semantic analysis of *blasphemy*-related terminology based on nearly 300 texts, but in chapters 5-12 we also provide an in-depth analysis of seven key passages on blasphemy. Our approach provides greater depth and brings out the texture and color of early Jewish conceptuality of blasphemy suited for the examination of FG.

2.7 Dunn and Other Scholars

2.7.1 Blasphemy as the violation of monotheism

A number of scholars have argued that commitment to monotheism was a crucial element of the Jewish matrix within which to place and understand emerging Christianity.[222] This is true not only if we are to grasp the origins and significance of

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[218] Bock (1998) 46-7.

[219] Identified by Louw and Nida (1989) 433-34 as associated with βλασφημέω in domain 33.387-33.403.

[220] Bock (1998) 30-66.

[221] Bock (1998) 66-110.

[222] Newman, Davila, and Lewis (1999); Bauckham (1998) *passim*; Hurtado (1998) *passim*; N.T. Wright (1992) 248-59; Dunn (1991) 19-21, 207-29; Hartman (1987) 85-99; Bauckham (1980-81) 322-

early Christian belief and worship,[223] but also if we are to understand the conflict and eventual parting of the ways between Christians and non-believing Jews.[224] Furthermore, it is common for scholars to assert that FG's emphasis on the divine status of the Son and the Father was perceived by some Jews to violate monotheism and thus it contributed to the parting of the ways.[225]

In a statement that is now famous, Dunn urged, "we only let John be John if we recognize that the primary debate the fourth evangelist engaged in with the rabbis was actually a debate about *monotheism.*"[226] In a more recent work, Dunn continues to argue that, from the perspective of emerging rabbinic Judaism, the claims made by Johannine Christians—that Jesus was equal with God—had gone a step too far and had abandoned the basic confession that God is one.[227]

Dunn is not alone in holding this conviction. Others hold that the Jewish commitment to preserve monotheism was a decisive factor that separated Jews and Christians, and this schism is clearly reflected in FG. In fact, the Johannine claim for the Son's equality and unity with the Father drew the charge of blasphemy and drew the line between Christianity and Judaism.[228] For example, Anderson notes that the term βλασφημέω occurs in relation to Jesus' proclamation, "I and the Father are one" (Jn 10:30) and then states that "the Christian confession was perceived as a breach of the basic Jewish premise of monotheism."[229] Similarly, de Jonge writes, "It is not

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41; Harvey (1980) 154-73. In contrast, Barker (1992) and Hayman (1991) believe that early Judaism was ditheistic and not monotheistic.

[223] This is the operating assumption of the collected essays by Newman, et al. (1999) x, 21-89; see also Hurtado (1998) *passim*; Stuckenbruck (1995) 47-204.

[224] Martin (1995) 133-5; Dunn (1991) 228-9.

[225] Anderson (1986) 117. Brown (1979) 67 argues that the dominant battle in FG concerns the divinity of Jesus. Those in agreement include: de Jonge (1998) 120; Collins (1997) 96, 102; Casey (1996) 30-32; Martin (1995) 134, 148; Wilson (1995) 78-9, 194; de Jonge (1995) 234-5; Dunn (1998a) 339; Segal (1994) 125-35, esp. 134; Casey (1991) 37, 158; Meeks (1990) 310; D. Moody Smith (1990a) 94; Neyrey (1988) 35; Dunn (1998a) 370; and Pancaro (1976) 501-2. In contrast, see O'Neill (1995a) 50-61, esp. 51, and McGrath (1998a) 8, who boldly states, "monotheism was not an issue of controversy between Jews and Christians."

[226] Dunn (1998a) 370.

[227] Dunn (1991) 228-9. See Dunn (1998a) 420, who also writes, "It was precisely the language of preexistence and conception of incarnation in reference to Jesus which was seen by Jewish opposition as a threat to the unity of God and so as the first real breach (perceived as such) with the Jewish monotheistic axiom."

[228] de Jonge (1998) 120, 141;

[229] Anderson (1986) 117; see also Sundberg (1970) 29.

surprising that outsiders interpreted as dangerous and even blasphemous the insistence of the Johannine community on the close unity between the exalted Son and the Father (as expressed in 1:18; 10:30, 38; 17:21-23)." Two of the foremost of Johannine scholars, C. K. Barrett and R. H. Lightfoot, argue that when *the Jews* first try to stone Jesus in 5:18, it is presumed that Jesus is being charged with blasphemy for violating monotheism and what follows in 5:19-47 is a defense of Christian monotheism.[230] Others like Segal, Martyn, and Scroggs argue that the Johannine claim for Jesus' divinity looked like *ditheism* and therefore blasphemy to certain Jews, and this was the beginning or an early form of *the two-power heresy* vigorously condemned in later rabbinic sources.[231] Lastly, scholars have noted that the repeated and extended efforts throughout FG to make clear the Son's relationship to the Father indicates that FG was defending against the charge of violating monotheism, which was perceived as blasphemy.[232]

2.7.2 Evaluation

Suffice to say, it is widely held that the charge of blasphemy in FG is a response to a breach of monotheism, but this claim has never been thoroughly examined. Is there any evidence that a "violation of monotheism" constituted blasphemy in early Judaism? This is a compound question because it not only involves the study of blasphemy, which is itself a complex undertaking, but also the highly debated issue of whether *monotheism* is itself an appropriate term for early Jewish beliefs.[233]

2.8 Conclusions

As the preceding survey shows, contemporary scholarship has reached a general consensus that *blasphemy in early Judaism entailed saying or doing something that was perceived to discredit or dishonor God.* This basic understanding may be expanded to several more comments.

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[230] Barrett (1978) 257 approvingly quotes Lightfoot's statement that 5:19-47 is "a defense of Christian monotheism."

[231] Segal (1977) 217; Martyn (1979) 72; Scroggs (1988) 78-8; cf. *b. Hag.* 14a.

[232] So argues de Jonge (1998) 120 and 141. Similarly, Neyrey (1988) 18-35, esp. 35; Wilson (1995) 72, 79; Collins (1997) 96, 102.

[233] E.g., Hayman (1991) 1-15.

First, as the survey has indicated, scholars have argued that *for an utterance or action to count as blasphemy it must be perceived to have been generated by a disdainful or contemptuous attitude toward God.* Both Bock and Brown have argued that blasphemy can be expressed in both *speech* and *action.* However, as Sanders and O'Neill have observed, the use of certain terms, like christological titles, are not blasphemous in themselves, but only become such when they are uttered with arrogant or insolent intent toward God or perceived to be uttered in that manner. Even the utterance of the divine Name, which is often treated as the prototypical form of blasphemy, is not blasphemous in itself.[234]

Second, as the review shows, *blasphemy in early Jewish literature can be observed in a wide range of verbal and non-verbal activities, such as misusing the Name, attacking the Temple, denigrating God's leaders or people, disdaining the Torah, usurping God's prerogatives, and elevating oneself to a status equal to God.* Many scholars would add *breaching monotheism* to this list. In addition, perhaps under the influence of Strack-Billerbeck, who put too much emphasis on Rabbinic jurisprudence, some scholars tend to limit their treatment of blasphemy by focusing on the utterance of the divine Name. However, as Bock has demonstrated, and Brown and others have intimated, blasphemy in early Judaism covered a much broader range than what is found in Rabbinic literature.[235]

Third, *early Jewish Christians were considered blasphemous by non-believing Jews,* so comment Sanders and Brown, because their Christological confessions were perceived to insult God by elevating Jesus. This is echoed by Harvey who states that the Johannine group continued to experience the trial of Jesus whenever their claims about Jesus were denied. Apparently, these scholars come to this conclusion rather intuitively, since no evidence is offered in support.

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[234] In certain circumstances, vocalizing the Name was required, as when the high priest read the Aaronic blessing in the Temple.

[235] Narrowing blasphemy to vocalizing the Name, as the Rabbis tended to do, may have been a more *humanizing* or *merciful* approach in that it surely would have reduced the number of blasphemous allegations.

CHAPTER 3
HISTORICAL, SOCIAL, AND LITERARY CONTEXTS

Before proceeding to a close inspection of key Jewish texts concerned with blasphemy (chapters 5-12), this chapter addresses several issues that are assumed throughout the remainder of this thesis. First, this chapter discusses the probable historical, sociological, and literary contexts for the initial production and propagation of FG. Then, a brief discussion is provided on mirror-reading a polemical text, the legitimacy of which this thesis assumes, but not without due caution. Lastly, we present a semantic analysis of βλασφημέω and related terminology in order to provide a basic orientation to the study of blasphemy in ancient Jewish and Christian texts.

3.1 Historical Context: Emerging Rabbinic Judaism

3.1.1 Destruction of the Temple in 70 C.E.

Prior to the destruction of the Temple in 70 C.E., Jewish religion was heterogeneous. There were Pharisees, Sadducees, Herodians, the Fourth Philosophy, Essenes, John the Baptist's disciples, Samaritans, Thepapeutae, Zealots, Sicarii, Apocalypticists, various messianic groups, and Jews who were not in any identifiable group. Indeed, there is good evidence that late Second Temple Judaism was marked by factionalism; different groups claimed to be the sole heirs of Israel's inheritance, often sharply criticizing and even condemning other Jews for some form of convenantal unfaithfulness.[236] Jewish Christians were part of this factious and heterogeneous mixture and, like other Jews, participated in Temple and synagogue activities. For example, Paul saw himself as an *exemplary Hebrew* and *Israelite* (e.g., 2 Cor 11:22; Phil 3:4-6) even though he was a follower of the Way (Acts 24:14). Because Paul was Jewish, he was Torah observant (Acts 21:26), participated in Temple rituals (e.g., Acts 24:18), went to synagogues (e.g., Acts 18:4), and was also disciplined as a Jew by other Jews (e.g., 2 Cor 11:24). There are, of course, instances where Paul was

pressured to leaving certain synagogues because of disputes (usually over the law) but, as we have seen, prior to 70 CE there is no evidence of a *policy* or *formal agreement* to excommunicate Jewish Christians from synagogues.[237]

With the destruction of Jerusalem and the Temple (70 C.E.) and the victory of the Romans in their war against the Jews (66-74 C.E.), it is almost impossible to overstate the crisis and disorientation that faced Jews during the last quarter of the first century.[238] The loss of the Temple was devastating, since it was the center of Jewish life and was regarded as the *axis mundi* of the universe. It was the place of God's presence among his covenant people and, through the daily sacrifices in the Temple, supported by the Temple tax, the Temple was the place where all Jews everywhere had access to God. With the destruction of the Temple, there followed the suspension of the Sanhedrin, the termination of sacrificial worship, the abolition of pilgrimages and feasts of the Temple, the destruction and confiscation of Judean land and property, and the humiliation of diverting the Jewish Temple tax to support the Temple of Jupiter Capitolinus in Rome.[239] In the aftermath of these tremendous losses, many Jewish sects either evaporated[240] or merged into a rising stream of Rabbinic Judaism.[241] Under the leadership of Rabban Yohanan ben Zakkai (70-85 C.E.) and Rabban Gamaliel (85-115 C.E.), a group of sages established the rabbinic school in the town of Yavneh (Jamnia) where they continued the traditions of the Pharisees[242] and, in the absence of the Temple, instituted dramatic changes that

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[236] Dunn (1990) 73-77 argues that early Jewish sources exhibit *factionalism*; e.g., 1 Macc., *Jubilees*, *Enoch*, CD, 1QS, *Psalms of Solomon*, and *T. Mos.* criticize other Jews, each for their own reasons, as *sinners, men of the lot of Belial, the wicked.*

[237] Stegemann and Stegemann (1999) 339 states that prior to 70 CE, Jewish-Christian conflicts with other Jews primarily involved individuals, but after 70 CE conflicts tended to involve groups.

[238] T. *Sotah* 5:11; 2 Baruch 10:6-18.

[239] Cohen (1984) 27-8; L. Levine (1993) 124-32; Schürer (1973) 1.521-4.

[240] The Essene center at Qumran was destroyed in 68 C.E. and groups like the Sicarii, Zealots, followers of John of Gischala and Simon Giora were killed, captured, or forced to flee; so L. Levine (1993) 126. According to *y. Sanh.* 10:6 29c, there were *24 groups of heretics* when the Temple was destroyed.

[241] Cohen (1984) 28-31, 43-5 argues that the Temple and its priesthood was a focal point for sectarian disputes but, with the destruction of the Temple, that focal point disappeared and with it the impetus that fueled sectarianism. In addition, the tannaitic literature shows the Yavnean rabbis had a propensity to tolerate disputes, which also weakened the sectarian spirit.

[242] Cohen (1984) 36-42 recognizes a close connection between the pre-70 Pharisees and the post-70 rabbinic sages, but argues that the Tannaim never called themselves *Pharisees*, perhaps to minimize their own sectarian identification and to create a more inclusivistic ethic. Only with the Amoraim is an explicit connection made between the rabbis and the Pharisees (e.g., *t. Yoma* 1:8; *y. Yoma* 1:5 (39a); *b. Yoma* 18b; *b. Qidd.* 66a; *b. Nid.* 33b).

reconstructed Judaism.[243] It is important to note that the term *Yavneh* refers to both a city, whose exact location is uncertain,[244] and to a complex process whereby the city of Yavneh functioned as a center for the emergence of Rabbinic Judaism between 70 and 135 CE.[245]

3.1.2 Emerging Rabbinic Judaism

Under Rabban Yohanan, due to the destruction of the Temple, the center of *Jewish identity and practice shifted* in three ways.[246] First, the place of animal sacrifice and atonement for sin disappeared. In response, Yohanan emphasized that acts of compassion had atoning significance, following Hos 6:6, "For I desire mercy, not sacrifice." Second, the Yavnean rabbis emphasized the intensive study of both the written and oral Torah, which has come to symbolize Judaism itself. Third, as part of intensive study of the Torah, obedience to God's commandments and statues took on renewed importance. Therefore, it is not surprising to read that, while interpreting a reference to white garments and anointing one's head with oil in *Midr Qoh.* 9.8 [42a], Yohanan is reported to have said, "They speak rather only of fulfilling the commandments and of good works and of the study of the Torah."[247]

Also under Rabban Yohanan, the center of *Jewish religious and political authority shifted* from the priesthood of Jerusalem and the Temple to the Yavnean sages and the *Beth Din* ("house of judgment" or court of law). The *Bavli* refers to nine *takkanot* (religious decrees) put forth by Yohanan that transferred certain practices associated with the Temple to the rabbinic courts and synagogues.[248] In this way, Yohanan and the sages asserted authority over liturgical, calendrical, and priestly matters and forged links between the defunct Temple and actual synagogue practice.[249] For

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[243] The reliability of the sources describing the emergence of the rabbinic school at Yavneh is difficult to assess because they were redacted at a later period (220-550 CE), show some variance in details, and are not transparent to separating fact from legend; Lewis (1992) 3.635.

[244] Lewis (1993) 3.634-5.

[245] The term *Yavneh* should *not* be understood to refer to a specific *council*; so W. D. Davies (1999) 193 n.13.

[246] Yee (1989) 19.

[247] Cited by Barrett (1975) 46. Noteworthy is a statement attributed to R. Simeon the Just (ca. 200 CE) that there are three pillars on which the world rests: the Torah, the Temple, and acts of compassion (*m. 'Abot.* 1.2).

[248] *B. Roš Haš.* 31b and *b. Soṭa* 40.

[249] Katz (1984) 46.

example, the sages were given authority to proclaim the New Year from rabbinical synagogues (formerly a right of the Temple priests)[250] and to announce the New Moon, which determined Feast days like Passover (previously a prerogative of the Jerusalem Sanhedrin).[251] Yohanan also regulated specific priestly activities when, for example, he required them to give the priestly blessing *with their shoes off*, just as they had in the Temple.[252] Moreover, Yohanan assumed authority over an element of Sabbath practice,[253] modified an aspect of the Feast of Tabernacles,[254] provided new rules for gifts and offerings normally brought to the Temple,[255] and was attributed with saying that acts of loving-kindness provided atonement as sacrifices once did.[256] Although the changes instituted by Yohanan might appear to be minor,[257] they had a major impact on establishing the authority of the Yavnean sages and in instituting the synagogue as a *valid equivalent* for the Temple, not because the synagogue replaced the Temple, but because the synagogue recalled it.[258]

Under the leadership of Rabban Gamaliel, the authority of Yavneh achieved wider recognition and status and became a center for sages who either lived in Yavneh or traveled there periodically.[259] The Tosepta indicates that 85 to 138 sages periodically gathered at Yavneh[260] and halakhic questions were brought there from all parts of the region and even from *Asia*.[261] Gamaliel's authority and power is evident in that he was able to remove the mayor of the city of Gader from office and, when there were court cases, he sat in the middle, with elders sitting to his right and left.[262] Various

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[250] *M. Roš Haš.* 4.1 (cf. *b. Roš Haš.* 29b) indicates that Yohanan allowed the *shofar* to be blown wherever there was a court, if a Festival-day of the New Year fell on a Sabbath.

[251] *M. Roš Haš.* 4.1-4

[252] *B. Roš Haš.* 31b.

[253] *B. Roš Haš.* 21b.

[254] *B. Roš. Haš.* 31b allows for the use of the palm branch in the provinces during Tabernacles.

[255] W. D. Davies (1964) 263; cf. *m. Ma'aś. S.* 5.2; *y. Šeqal.* 8.4; *y. Ḥal.* 1.1.

[256] *'Abot R. Nat.* A 4.

[257] L. Levine (1993) 136 notes that the changes brought by Yohanan were relatively minor; in contrast, W. D. Davies (1964) 262 sees that Yohanan's changes, however minor, brought prestige to Yavneh as the center of Jewish authority.

[258] So W. D. Davies (1964) 261, 269-70 and Yee (1989) 20, who both note that Yohanan did not want to replace the Temple, since he expected it to be restored.

[259] L. Levine (1993) 136.

[260] L. Levine (1993) 136-7; cf. *t. Kelim--B. Bat.* 2.4 and *Sipre Num* 124.

[261] L. Levine (1993) 137; cf. *t. Kelim--B. Bat.* 5.6; *t. Kil* 1.3-4; *t. Nid.* 4.3-4; *t. Kelim--B. Meṣ.* 11.2

[262] L. Levine (1993) 137; cf. *t. Sanh* 8.1; *y. Roš. Haš.* 1.6, 57b; *b. Roš Haš.* 22a.

sages, including Gamaliel himself, traveled throughout the land of Israel, even to Alexandria and Rome, supervising practices and giving halakhic advice.[263] Under Gamaliel, significant decisions were made regulating prayer, the canon, purification, family laws, vows, rules of testimony, the development of the Passover seder and much of the Passover *haggadah*, and other questions of practical importance.[264] Although Cohen argues that the Yavnean rabbis helped eliminate Jewish sectarianism by tolerating disputes and allowing for pluralism within their ranks,[265] the Rabbinic sages made no room for (a) those who refused to follow the majority rule and (b) those who maintained a sectarian spirit.[266] The former category included R. Eliezer ben Hyrcanus, who was excommunicated for not accepting a majority ruling,[267] and even Rabban Gamaliel, who was deposed from leadership for a period of time for imposing his will on the other sages.[268] The latter category included persistent sectarians who, eventually, were cursed in the *Birkat ha-Minim*.[269] Hence, the Rabbinic influence on reshaping Jewish unity and identity moved in two directions simultaneously by either absorbing sectarianism or excluding it.

It should be emphasized that the Yavnean sages and the Johannine Christians shared the same post-70 C.E. milieu. Just as Yavnean sages coped with the loss of the Temple by reunifying Israel around a different center, so the Johannine Jewish Christians took similar measures. It is significant, therefore, that the issues addressed by the Yavnean rabbis are very similar, if not in detail, at least in general tenor, to the concerns that occupied the Fourth Evangelist. In addition to the question of religious authority, which is replete throughout FG (e.g., 7:17), the Fourth Evangelist was concerned with Torah study (5:39), the Temple and its loss (11:48), the Temple and a New Temple (2:13-22), where to worship without the Temple (4:20), synagogue participation (9:22; 12:42; 16:2), rules of testimony (8:17-18), purification (2:6; 3:25; 18:28), and the Jewish calendar—Sabbath (5:9-18; 9:14-16), Passover (2:13, 23; 6:4;

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[263] L. Levine (1993) 137 provides numerous references to the Tosepta and Mishna.

[264] L. Levine (1993) 139-40; Lewis (1993) 3.636.

[265] E.g., *b. Ber.* 11a concerns the posture of a person reciting the *Shema* and allows the differing opinions expressed by the House of Hillel and the House of Shammai to stand side-by-side.

[266] Cohen (1984) 49.

[267] *B. Meṣ* 59b; *y. Mo'ed Qaṭ* 3:1 [81c-d]; cf. Stemberger (1996) 69f; Cohen (1984) 49; L. Levine (1993) 138.

[268] *B. Ber.* 27b-28a; *y. Ber.* 4:1 [7c-d]; cf. Cohen (1984) 49; L. Levine (1993) 139.

[269] Cohen (1984) 49; see our discussion in chapter 1.

11:55-56; 12:1; 13:1; 18:28, 39), Tabernacles (7:2), Dedication (10:22) and other feasts (5:1).

It is going beyond the available evidence to suggest that FG was a counter-response to specific decisions issued by a specific "council of Yavneh."[270] However, it would not be a leap in the dark, but a step into the available light, to suggest that FG, which has its origins in Palestine,[271] was addressing both the post-70 C.E. climate of disorientation and a climate warmed by the reforms initiated by nascent Rabbinic Judaism. Although there is no clear evidence that Yavnean Judaism and the Johannine community were in direct conversation, we can at least say that they were on a collision course, because each offered different solutions to the post-70 C.E. problems. For the Johannine community, the center was not the Torah, but Christ, to whom the Torah pointed to (5:39) and to whom Moses wrote about (5:46). For the Johannine community, acts of compassion did not make atonement, but the death of Jesus, who was the Lamb of God (1:29), offered on behalf of the nation (11:51), and killed at the very time Passover sacrifices were prepared (19:30-31). In addition, the Johannine community saw Jesus as the New Temple,[272] so they did not need a restored Temple or a detailed record of laws pertaining to the Temple as we find in the Rabbinic literature.[273] The stark discontinuities between *the theology articulated by FG* and *the reforms and traditions of Rabbinic Judaism* suggest that aspects of Johannine theology may have been offensive to Jews who had embraced the reforms at Yavneh. On the basis of our conclusions regarding blasphemy (see chapters 5-12), we will be able to explore just how offensive certain aspects of Johannine theology

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[270] This seems to be the position of Mann (1988) 7, who argues FG was written in response to or "against the decisions of Jamnia." Formerly, it was held that there was a specific "council of Yavneh," but this is largely rejected. Instead, the Rabbinic activities that centered at Yavneh must be seen as a complex process that occurred over many years; see Lewis (1993) 634-7.

[271] So Brown (1966) lix-lxi; Beasley-Murray (1987) lxxx, Martyn (1977) 158-60; Brown (1979) argues more narrowly for a Judean setting, whereas Bassler (1981) 243-57 and Meeks (1985) 101 argues for a Galilean origin. It is, of course, conceivable that the final form of FG was published outside the land of Israel in places like Ephesus (so Irenaeus *Adv. Haer.* 3.1.2), Alexandria (so Kirsopp Lake), or Antioch (so Ephraem the Syrian).

[272] See the argument in chapter 14.

[273] E.g., the regulations concerning the offering of the first fruits at the Temple (*m. Bik.*), the half-shekel tax used for the Temple and the Temple ceremonies (*m. Pesaḥ*), the festival of Sukkah in the Temple (*m. Sukk.*), the three pilgrimage festivals of the Temple (*m. Ḥag.*), the sacrifices and offerings associated with the Temple (*m. Zebaḥ., m. Menaḥ., m. Tamid, m. Qinnim*), and the measures and furnishings of the Temple (*m. Mid.*)

could have been perceived by other Jews and to what degree this theology could have provoked the expulsion of Johannine Jewish Christians from the synagogue.

3.2 Social Context: Conflict

As we have seen, the resources for reconstructing the history of the Johannine community are, at best, only probable and suggestive. Nevertheless, our understanding of the Johannine community's experience can be extended by using Lewis Coser's analysis of social conflict.[274] Of the sixteen propositions presented by Coser, two are particularly relevant for understanding how the Johannine conflict is related to group proximity and group boundaries.

3.2.1 Conflict and proximity

One of Coser's basic propositions is that *the closer the relationship, the more intense the conflict.*[275] For example, a person perceived to be a heretic will incite a more hostile reaction than an apostate or renegade who leaves the group.[276] As opposed to an apostate or renegade, a heretic shares the goals and values of the parent group but offers alternative interpretations or proposes different means to achieve the group's desired ends. As such, a heretic threatens the unity, even the existence, of a group by competing for the loyalty of its members. Because a heretic remains within or close to the group, a heretic will spark more fierce conflict than an apostate or renegade.

The sharp anti-*Jewish* polemic found in FG "is best explained as a phenomenon of proximity, that is, of a close relationship to Judaism."[277] Even a cursory reading of

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[274] Coser (1956) presents a classic work on social conflict theory, which views society as the product of conflicting forces and competing interests regarding needs, desires, and goals. Coser's work is based on Georg Simmel's *Conflict* (Glencoe, Illinois: Free Press, 1955).

[275] Coser (1956) 67-72; cf. Stegemann and Stegemann (1999) 34.

[276] Coser (1956) 70-71, 169 n. 4.

[277] Stegemann and Stegemann (1999) 227. This assumes a concrete historical situation in which Johannine Jewish Christians and certain other Jews were engaged in an *actual* social conflict. It is possible, of course, that FG is engaged in a type of *symbolic anti-Judaism*, a term used by Mariam Taylor (1994) *passim*. Although Taylor deals with patristic writings and not specifically with NT documents, she concludes that Christian expressions of anti-Judaism did not arise out of response to Jews in a context of conflict—*the conflict theory* made popular by Marcel Simon—but out of a need for Christians to resolve theological contradictions inherent in appropriating the Jewish tradition and at the same time rejecting other aspects of the Jewish heritage. See Taylor (1994) 127-9

FG reveals an intense conflict between *the Jews* and Jesus at the story level.[278] On the one hand, this hostility can be seen in the attacks on Jesus and the Johannine community. Jesus is accused of breaking the Sabbath (5:18), blasphemy (5:18; 8:58; 10:33; 18:23), demon possession (7:20; 8:48; 10:20), being a Samaritan (8:48), deceiving the people (7:13, 47), and threatening both the Temple and the Jewish nation (2:20; 11:48). In addition, as a two-level reading of FG suggests (see chapter 1), just as Jesus encounters hostility at the story level, so there are indications that the Fourth Evangelist and his community experienced similar hostility (3:11; 9:22; 15:18-19; 16:2-4). On the other hand, FG witnesses to a counter-attack against *the Jews,* who are accused of seeking their own glory (5:44), failing to keep the Mosaic law (7:19), erroneous and harmful interpretation of the law (7:21-24), being children of the devil (8:44), and spiritual blindness (9:39-41; 12:40). Clearly, FG testifies to an acrimonious conflict that can be understood as an intense, intra-Jewish quarrel.[279]

However, *Coser's observation that closeness and conflict are functionally related also helps explain why FG uses the term the Jews* (οἱ Ἰουδαῖοι) *in both positive and negative ways.* We will focus on this issue in depth in chapter 15. For the moment, let it suffice to note that the intense conflict depicted in FG suggests that the Johannine Jewish Christians and certain Jews had a close and even positive relationship in many ways. Not only were some of Jesus' followers called *Jews* (4:9; 7:31; 12:11), but it appears that the Johannine group and certain other Jews shared common hopes, goals, and values. Both groups shared hopes regarding a coming prophet (1:21; 6:14) and a coming messiah (1:41; 7:31, 41). Both had common goals of eternal life (5:39; 10:10) and salvation (4:22, 42). Both groups valued the appropriate worship of God (4:20, 24) and were concerned about sacred days, including Sabbath (5:9), Passover (2:13; 6:4), Tabernacles (7:2), and Dedication (10:22). Both groups drew upon the same scriptures (5:39), especially the traditions of Abraham (8:31-59) and Moses (5:44-47; 6:31-51). It is assumed that, at one point in history, the Johannine Jewish Christians and their non-believing Jewish neighbors shared a close relationship in the synagogue (9:22; 12:42; 16:2). We concur with von

[278] Margaret Davies (1992) 44-66 identifies four levels, including story-time, the disciples' time, the narrator's time, and the reader's time.

[279] Ashton (1991) 137 characterizes the conflict as a *family quarrel.*

Wahlde, who writes that "not only does the Gospel of John clearly have a positive estimation for the Jewish tradition, but also the Jewish tradition is the very soul and life of the Johannine tradition."[280] *The Jews* probably represent a parent group[281] for the Johannine Jewish Christians and, like the heretic described by Coser, the Johannine group claimed to uphold the same hopes, values, and goals as the parent group, but offered alternatives that were unacceptable for the parent group. Because the Johannine Christians both identified with and reacted against certain non-believing Jews, it is not surprising to find both positive and negative uses of *the Jews*. Starkly put, and with some risk of misunderstanding, the Johannine Christians *hated* the Jews just at the points where they *loved* them the most.[282]

One more implication can be drawn from Coser's observation: *FG appears to have reached its final form when the process of separation between certain non-believing Jews and the Johannine Jewish Christians was not yet complete.*[283] This becomes more evident when we distinguish between two levels of conflict: the time of the story (Jesus and his disciples) and the time of the narrator (when the Gospel was written).[284] No one disputes the evidence of conflict at the story level, which has already been noted. But there is also evidence of ongoing conflict at the narrator's level in what can be called *distancing strategies* used by the author.[285] That is, the author of FG, through the voice of the narrator prejudices readers away from non-believing Jews and what we assume is emerging Rabbinic Judaism.[286] This

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[280] Von Wahlde (1993) 69.

[281] Von Wahlde (1993) 70-1 speaks of *parent Judaism*, but only for the first two periods of the Johannine history, which corresponds to what he believes were the first two editions of the Gospel.

[282] This is an adaptation of a famous statement by Meeks (1975) 172 that "FG is most anti-Jewish just at the points it is most Jewish."

[283] J. T. Sanders (1993) 41 believes that the conflict depicted by FG occurs when, or shortly after, Jewish Christians were still attending synagogues. Malina (1985) 11 and Stibbe (1992) 64 believe that FG's language reveals a situation in which the Johannine Jewish Christians had *recently* broken away from the larger parent group. In contrast, Meeks (1975) 182 writes, "It seems clear that at the time of composition of the Gospel the Johannine community is separate from *the Jews* and no longer expects *Jews* to convert." Similarly, Hengel (1989) 119-20 argues that the *expulsion* had long since past as witnessed by the way FG depicts Jesus talking to *the Jews* about *your law* and to the disciples about *their law* (Jn 7:51; 8:17; 10:34 [cf. 7:19]; 12:34; 15:25; 18:31)

[284] Margaret Davies (1992) 44-66.

[285] On *distancing strategies*, see Kysar (1993) 115, n. 6; Stegemann and Stegemann (1999) 348-9; Stanton (1992) 96-97; Blenkinsopp (1981) 1-2

[286] This corresponds to *the ideological point of view* of the narrator. See Culpepper (1983) 32.

ideological level of communication occurs between the implied author/narrator[287] and the implied/intended reader.[288] Very simply, this is how it works: The narrator describes *the Jews* in a negative light or, more subtlety, in ways that *distances* them or *distinguishes* them from the heroes of the story—Jesus and his disciples. Then, as readers identify with Jesus and his disciples at the story level, they begin to distance themselves from non-believing Jews outside the story. An example of this distancing strategy can be seen when Jesus begins to describe his departure to his disciples by saying, "as I said to the Jews now I say to you" (13:33), as if the disciples were not Jews themselves. Another example is when *the Jews* are depicted as never having heard or seen the Father (5:37), which distances them from Jesus' disciples who are said to have seen the Father (14:7-9).[289] And, of course, there are the more explicit attacks on *the Jews* as when, for example, Jesus says that the father of *the Jews* is the devil (Jn 8:44). In this way, the narrator encourages the first-century readers—particularly the Johannine Jewish group—to separate from non-believing Jews in order to commit themselves more fully to the Johannine agenda. Such strategies suggest that there *was continuing conflict at the time of the final writing of the Gospel* and that members of the Johannine group were perceived to be *too close* to certain non-believing Jews.

3.2.2 Conflict and boundaries

Another one of Coser's propositions is that *group boundaries are established and maintained through conflict with an outside group*.[290] Conflict with an outside group increases the internal cohesion of a group by making members more conscious of their bonds and by increasing their participation.[291] This dynamic is apparent with a sect, which by nature is exclusive and in conflict with an outside group. A sect is born in conflict, maintains its identity through conflict, and increases its internal

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[287] The *implied author* and *the narrator* are synonymous for FG; see Culpepper (1983) 16.

[288] Regarding the terms *implied author*, *implied reader*, and *narrator*, see Culpepper (1983) 15-18. I am using the terms *intended reader* and *implied reader* synonymously; however see Moloney (1997) 219-33 for a more careful distinction between these terms.

[289] Concerning other ways in which FG negatively characterizes *the Jews*, see Culpepper (1983) 128-30. For Culpepper, the characterization of *the Jews* is not concerned with historical Jews but, like other characters in FG, have representative value; for Culpepper, *the Jews* symbolize "the heart and soul of unbelief."

[290] Coser (1956) 87.

[291] Coser (1956) 90.

cohesion by conflict. A sect is a *conflict group*.[292] This is an apt characterization of the Johannine Christians, for not only did their conflict with the Jews lead to their expulsion from the synagogue but, as scholars argue, factious conflicts continued to plague their beleaguered communities from then on.[293]

As Coser notes, in order to preserve group boundaries, conflict groups conduct periodic self-purification drives.[294] To maintain purity and internal cohesion, conflict groups seek out and expunge dissenters and tend "to *invent* both inside and outside enemies in order to strengthen inner solidarity."[295] Although it is difficult to ascertain whether the Johannine group invented enemies, it is clear that internal cohesion and unity was a priority for them as witnessed by several passages in the Johannine writings (Jn 13:34-35; 15:12-13; 17:1-26; 1 Jn 3:11-18). In addition, several other passages in FG either depict purges or anticipated them. For example, after Jesus' discourse on the bread from heaven (Jn 6:25-59), we are told that a large number of his followers "were no longer walking with him," οὐκέτι μετ' αὐτοῦ περιεπάτουν (Jn 6:66). In the farewell discourse, Jesus warns that whoever does not abide in him, the true vine, will wither and be thrown into the fire (Jn 15:5-6). In the Johannine letters, even more defections, self-purifications, and warnings are referred to (1 Jn 2:19; 2 Jn 9; 3 Jn 9-10). It is evident that throughout the Johannine material, the inner enemy is rejected as energetically as the outer enemy. Thus Coser's comment that the "small, close, struggle group ... cannot deal with internal conflict and hence punishes expression of dissent with exclusion," seems applicable to the Johannine community.[296]

Conflict theory provides a possible explanation for at least *some aspects* of the Johannine social milieu in which the prosecution of blasphemy, with its name-calling and rock-throwing, had been experienced. The Johannine community was in the *process* of distancing itself from a very close relationship with a parent group that

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[292] Coser (1956) 98-103.

[293] The conflicts centered on christology, ethics, eschatology, and pneumatology, according to Brown (1979) 93-144.

[294] Coser (1956) 101.

[295] Coser (1956) 102 [his emphasis].

[296] Coser (1956) 102.

held similar traditions, values, and goals. However, because the Johannine group articulated a different way to interpret their shared traditions and to achieve their common values and goals—summed up by the phrase *confessing Jesus as the Christ* (Jn 9:22; 20:31)—they experienced a bitter conflict and eventual separation from the parent group. The conflict and separation was probably not a singular event, but a process in which the development of Johannine ideology (e.g., high christology) and hostility fed off each other, each growing more intense over time.[297] By the time the final form of FG was written, the spiral of hostility had produced two, separate and distinct groups that were, nevertheless, still struggling and still too close for comfort. If our analysis has been correct, then as the writing of FG neared completion, name-calling and rock throwing continued between the Johannine Jewish Christians and non-believing Jews.

3.3 Literary Context: Covenantal Lawsuit

The author of FG "appears to have cast much of his material in the form of a long-drawn-out trial, in which the underlying issues are exposed and by which the reader is challenged to form his own judgment and cast his own verdict."[298] If this is so, then it may reinforce or support the argument that members of the Johannine community were being accused of blasphemy. If members were being charged with blasphemy, either formally or informally, certainly a trial motif would have been an apt way to cast the material of FG. Although the burden of proof for the contention that Jewish Christians were accused of blasphemy must rest with this thesis as a whole, we can at least establish that the literary context of FG is congruent with a *Sitz im Leben* in which people are experiencing social strife of a juridical nature.

3.3.1 Trial motif

In each of the major divisions of FG, a trial motif can be observed. There is a general consensus among scholars regarding the basic structure of FG. Brown's four-part outline is representative: Prologue (Jn 1:1-18), Book of Signs (Jn 1:19 -12:50), Book of Glory (Jn 13:1 - 20:31), and Epilogue (Jn 21:1-25).[299] In each section, juridical

[297] J. T. Sanders (1993) 126.
[298] Harvey (1976) 123.
[299] Brown (1970) cxxxviii. Similar outlines can be found in the commentaries by Barrett (1978), Beasley-Murray (1987), Ridderbos (1997), Dodd (1953), and Witherington (1995). Despite

language permeates the narrative and pushes the plot. In Jn 1:1-18, the trial motif is introduced by complementary references to John the Baptist who *testifies* on behalf of the Logos (Jn 1:6-8, 15). The second section, Jn 1:19—12:50, begins with the public *testimony* of John the Baptist (1:19-27, 32-34) and ends with a discussion about *judgment* and Jesus' word of *judgment* (12:47-50), thus highlighting the trial motif by means of an *inclusio*. Throughout the second section, as Harvey has argued,[300] Jesus is on trial before *the Jews*.[301] From John 5:16 to 11:53, from episode to episode, Jesus is shown defending himself against *accusations* of breaking the Sabbath (5:16; 7:23; 19:6, 24), blasphemy (5:18; 8:58-59; 10:33; cf. 19:7; 18:23), false teaching (7:12, 47; 9:24, 29), demon-possession (7:20; 8:48, 52; 10:20), and being an enemy of "our temple and our nation" (11:48).[302] In addition, Jesus is subject to hostile *interrogations* by the crowd (6:30; 7:20), the Pharisees (8:13, 19), and *the Jews* (8:25, 33, 48, 52-53), which is followed by equally sharp interrogations of his disciples (9:10, 12, 15, 17, 19, 25-26). In the face of these accusations and interrogations, numerous *witnesses* appear on behalf of the Johannine Jesus:

> The Baptist (1.7f., 15, 32; 3:26; 5:33), the Samaritan woman (4.39), the works of Jesus (5.36; 10:25), the Old Testament (5.39), the multitude (12.17), the Holy Spirit and the apostles (15.26f.), God the Father himself (5:32, 37; 8:18), all bear witness to Jesus. Jesus himself ... bears witness to the truth (18.27; cf. 3.11), in conjunction with the Father (8.13-18) whose consentient testimony validates his own.[303]

In the third section, Jn 13:1—20:31, the trial motif surfaces in references to the παράκλητος, the *advocate* (14:16, 26; 15:26; 16:7), the high priest's questioning of Jesus regarding blasphemy, κακῶς λάλησας (18:19-24; esp. 19:23; cf. LXX Ex 22:27), and the Roman interrogation of Jesus for sedition (18:28—19:16). During the Roman and Jewish examinations, Jesus challenges the authorities to bring witnesses against him, but no one comes forward. According to Trites, "The fact that no reference is made to anyone taking up the challenge is intended by John to suggest

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speculations about textual rearrangements by Bultmann (1971) and Bernard (1929), their outlines are comparable to Brown's.

[300] Harvey (1976) *passim*.

[301] Unlike the Synoptics (cf. Mk 15:53-65), FG does not present an account of Jesus on trial before the Sanhedrin; however, Jn 11:45-53 depicts a rather official condemnation of Jesus *in absentia* by the Sanhedrin.

[302] The chief priests and Pharisees are depicted as announcing that Jesus will provoke the Romans to come and take away "our place and our nation," ἡμῶν καὶ τὸν τόπον καὶ τὸ ἔθνος (Jn 11:48); cf. Acts 6:13 and 2 Macc 5:19 where τόπος has the meaning of *temple*.

[303] Barrett (1978) 159.

that Jesus won the lawsuit; even Pilate thrice declares that Jesus is innocent (18:38; 19:4, 6)."[304] In the end, by bringing Jesus to trial, the opponents of Jesus are unmasked as idolatrous and their condemnation is self-evident for those who can see (19:15c; cf. 9:39-41). Finally, the Epilogue closes with a twofold reference to the truth of the Beloved Disciple's *testimony* (21:24).[305]

3.3.2 Covenantal lawsuit

Understanding FG from the perspective of the lawsuit, of claim and counter-claim, is strengthened when compared with other early Jewish literature regarding covenant lawsuits. For example, FG echoes the covenant lawsuit between Yahweh and the false gods in Isaiah 40-55.[306] In Isaiah, the lawsuit concerns the claims of Yahweh as Creator, as the only true God, and as the Lord of history (Isa 40:25-31; 44:6-8; 45:8-11, 21). In FG, the lawsuit concerns the claim of messiahship and divine sonship (Jn 20:31). In Isaiah, there are two lawsuits: one lawsuit is between Yahweh, represented by Israel, and the gods, represented by the idolatrous nations (Isa 41:5, 21-29; 43:8-13; 44:6-8; 45:18-25); another lawsuit is between Yahweh and unfaithful Israel (Isa 42:18-25; 43:22-28; 50:1-3). In FG, the lawsuit is between Jesus and the world, and between Jesus and *the Jews*. In Isaiah, the gods are challenged to state their case, but they are silent (Isa 41:21-23; 43:9; 44:7); they cannot foretell or influence events; they have no real existence (Isa 41:24, 26-29). In FG, the witnesses against Jesus are also silent; they have no real claim.

One more important note needs to be made regarding the trial speeches of Yahweh against the nations in Isaiah.[307] The purpose of the trial in Isaiah is to determine the identity of the true God. In the first speech, Yahweh states, "I am God, the first, and for the things coming, I am" (ἐγὼ θεὸς πρῶτος, καὶ εἰς τὰ ἐπερχόμενα ἐγώ εἰμι) (LXX Isa 41:4). In the final speech, Yahweh is identified as the Creator who has spoken openly as "I am, I am (the) Lord, the one who speaks righteousness and

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[304] Trites (1977) 83.

[305] More internal evidence for the lawsuit motif comes from the Gospel's use of: (1) judgment-language, like κρίσις, κρίνειν, and κρίμα, (2) division-language, like σχίσμα, and (3) dualisms. See Ashton (1991) 220-32; J. Blank (1964) *passim*.

[306] Lincoln (1994) 20; Trites (1977) 79, 84.

[307] Here I am dependent on Lincoln (1994) 20-23.

who declares the truth" (ἐγώ εἰμι ἐγώ εἰμι κύριος λαλῶν δικαιοσύνην καὶ ἀναγγέλλων ἀλήθειαν) (LXX Isa 45:19b). Throughout the ordeal, it is clear that Yahweh is defending himself at the trial: "Accuse me, let us judge" (Isa 43:26). He is both a witness (LXX 43:10, 12) and a judge (Isa 43:26). What is particularly important to notice is that Yahweh defends himself by claiming that he is the true and only God: "I am the first and I am the last, and besides me there is no god" (Isa 44:6; cf 40:18, 23; 41:4; 43:10-11; 45:5-6; 46:9; 48:12). The glory and honor of Yahweh is at stake (Is 49:3; 44:23; 45:25) and his servant will be *exalted and glorified* (ὑψωθήσεται καὶ δοξασθήσεται) (LXX Isa 52:13). Isaiah declares the oneness of God in unison with, and as a function of, the ἐγώ εἰμι formula. Monotheism is asserted over against idolatry for God's glory and the people of Israel, who understand the *I am*, are called to testify that Yahweh is the one true God (Isa 43:10). When we turn to FG, the cosmic lawsuit of Isaiah reverberates throughout the narrative. Not only are there three direct quotes from Isaiah (Jn 1:23; 6:45; 12:38), but FG repeatedly uses the ἐγώ εἰμι formula (e.g., Jn 8:24, 58; 13:19), appeals to the oneness of God (e.g., Jn 5:44; 10:30; 17:3, 22), emphasizes that Jesus will be exalted to the glory and honor of God (Jn 12:23-33; cf. 1:14; 17:5, 22, 24), and sets loyalty to God over against idolatry (Jn 4:21-24; 5:44; 19:15c). The point is that FG implicitly and explicitly echoes the juridical language of Second Isaiah. Such echoes suggest that the author FG was portraying the conflict between Jesus and his opponents as nothing less than a covenant lawsuit between Yahweh and an unfaithful world.[308]

The preceding considerations—the trial motif in FG and the correspondence between FG and the covenantal lawsuit in Isaiah—suggests that *FG can be understood as a covenantal lawsuit or an extended trial with two claimants: God and his agents (Jesus and the Johannine community) on one side and the world and non-believing Jews on the other.* In this way, the intertextual echoes of Isaiah's covenant lawsuit

[308] Borgen (1986) 67-78 has observed six basic *halakic* principles of legal agency in FG. The fourth principle mentioned by Borgen concerns the mission of an agent is set within the context of a lawsuit. The Jewish principle, "Go forth and take legal action so that you may acquire title to it and secure the claim for yourself" (*B. Qam.* 70a), which sounds similar to "Yours they were and you have given them to me" (Jn 17:6). Borgen (1986) 70 writes that "According to the *halakah* the sender transferred his own rights and the property concerned to his agent." In the words of FG, the Father has transferred his rights to Christ, who in turn functions as the Father's agent in the lawsuit with the world. See our expanded treatment in § 13.3.4.

within FG (the oneness of God, the use of ἐγώ εἰμι, the exaltation and glory of God, and idolatry) is set over against the allegation that Jesus and his followers have committed blasphemy, broken the Sabbath, led the multitudes astray, and threatened the Temple and the nation of Israel. It is probably significant that FG was cast in the form of a *trial* narrative, particularly if the Johannine Jewish group was in the process of undergoing trials and persecutions themselves. If this was the case, FG could have functioned as counter-propaganda against accusations such as blasphemy.

3.4 Mirror-Reading FG

Since the aim of this thesis is to test whether members within the Johannine community would have been considered blasphemous by non-believing Jews during the late first century, an effort will be made *to reconstruct the probable reaction of non-believing Jews toward certain claims made by FG regarding the exaltation of Jesus (chapter 13), the Temple (chapter 14), and the Ἰουδαῖοι (chapter 15).* Because there are no extant literary or inscriptional testimony about the apparent dispute between the Johannine group and non-believing Jews independent of FG,[309] we must use FG as a *mirror* to see indirectly the attitudes and beliefs of the non-believing Jews about the Johannine members.[310] Reconstructing the non-believing Jewish reaction is, of course, assisted by an awareness of the probable historical environment (§3.2.1), the social dynamics displayed by conflict groups (§3.2.2), the literary genre (covenant law suit) with which FG depicts the conflict (§3.2.3), and the various Jewish beliefs and attitudes regarding blasphemy (chapters 5-12).

However, as Barclay[311] and others[312] have pointed out, there are numerous pitfalls associated with mirror-reading polemical texts. Although Barclay is primarily concerned with Galatians, he lists several dangers that are also relevant for critically reading FG. The first danger is *undue selectivity*. This involves putting too much emphasis on certain issues raised by FG, while minimizing or neglecting others. A

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[309] Evidence external to FG for such conflict experiences, in principle, should not be expected. Even large scale conflicts, like the pogroms against Jews in Alexandria (Philo *Flacc.* 41-96) and Antioch (Josephus *War* 7.43-62), which included massive killings and horrific cruelties, are only known to us by those affected.

[310] See Barclay (1987) 73-93 and Motyer (1997) 23-4.

[311] Barclay (1987) 73-93.

[312] Bauckham (1998) 9-48, esp. 22-26; Motyer (1997) 24-5; Culpepper (1998) 43.

plausible reconstruction of the debate must account for the Gospel as a whole and not just part. For example, to argue that the charge of blasphemy resulted from a ditheistic Christology[313] neglects other issues raised by FG. An accurate reconstruction must also account for FG's considerable effort to develop Temple imagery and to stigmatize the Ἰουδαῖοι. A second danger is *over-interpretation.* In a polemical text like FG, it is easy to imagine that every narrative aside or every statement by Jesus is a rebuttal or criticism of Jewish opponents. While it is fair to assume that FG is countering certain viewpoints, not everything is directed at rebutting opponents. Just because we hear Jesus say, "I tell you, everyone who commits sin is a slave to sin" (8:32; NRSV), does not mean that it was directed against certain people who denied it. A third danger is *mishandling polemics.* Barclay reminds us that "We should never underestimate the distorting effects of polemic."[314] Interpreters can mishandle polemics if they fail to recognize that inflated language can conceal, as well as misrepresent, points of dispute.[315] In addition, interpreters can be seduced by such distortion if they take sides or if they dress up John's opponents with the clothes of their own theological foes.[316] A fourth danger is "*latching onto particular words and phrases* as direct echoes of the opponents' vocabulary."[317] At first, this appears to be less a problem with FG than with a text like Galatians. For example, in Gal 6:1, Paul addresses "you who are spiritual," the πνευματικοί. Numerous scholars assume that Paul latched onto this term because his opponents use the term; they called themselves "spiritual" or else they boasted about their spiritual gifts.[318] With this assumption in mind, Galatians is read as a reproof against such spiritual arrogance. Surely, this is to make too much of a single word. Johannine scholarship exhibits a similar danger with the current trend to interpret Johannine

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[313] Wilson (1995) 71-4.

[314] Barclay (1987) 75.

[315] On the one hand, it is possible that John misunderstood *the Jews* and, on the other, that *the Jews* only have symbolic value. In either case, historical reconstruction is precluded. It is impossible to determine whether John misunderstood his opponents, since there are no sources other than John to settle the matter. At best, we can evaluate FG's internal consistency and its coherence with other first-century Jewish literature. For a negative appraisal of FG's *truth-value*, see Casey (1996) 111-39 and 218-29, who concludes that FG is both anti-Jewish and historically untrue. Regarding the literary use of *the Jews*, see chapter 15 on the Ἰουδαῖοι.

[316] This is an adaptation of Barclay's (1987) 81 wry comment: "There is the particular danger in the temptation to dress up Paul's opponents with the clothes of one's own theological foes."

[317] Barclay (1987) 81.

[318] Barclay (1987) 82.

terms and phrases as *anti-language*. Borrowing from the field of socio-linguistics, Malina and Rohrbaugh argue that the Johannine Christians use "ordinary terms from ordinary language of the larger society but give them special in-group meanings that are only understood by insiders."[319] Dualistic terminology—light/darkness, above/below, spirit/flesh, life/death, Israel/Judeans—is viewed as anti-language, as language that characterizes both the in-group (the Johannine Christians) and the out-group (*the Jews*). Since *common* terminology, and not just *unique* terminology, is used to reconstruct a mirror image of the Johannine opponents, this method may open larger pitfalls than those that have swallowed interpreters of Galatians. So, it is with caution that this thesis draws upon some of Malina and Rohrbaugh's analysis of "anti-language" in arguing, for example, that FG presents Jesus as the New Temple (see chapter 14).

To avoid the dangers associated with mirror-reading polemical texts, Barclay offers several guidelines, four of which have played a frequent role in our own reconstruction of the Johannine situation:[320] (a) *Tone:* Particularly forceful statements may correspond to particular needs; for example, statements made in FG about Jesus' exalted authority and status could point toward the need for social stability and direction in a post-70 C.E. environment (chapter 13). (b) *Frequency:* Repeated statements or motifs may correspond to a specific situation; for example, the recurring Temple imagery and motifs could be responding to the loss of the Jerusalem Temple (see chapter 14). (c) *Unfamiliarity*: Unusual ideas or statements may be prompted by the situation; for example, the unique way in which FG uses the term Ἰουδαῖοι might have been motivated by certain social tensions (chapter 15). (d) *Historical plausibility*: External evidence is brought in as a control; for example, the post-70 C.E. situation after the destruction of the Temple (§ 3.1) seems to provide evidence and possible motive for presenting Jesus as the New Temple (chapter 14).

[319] Malina and Rohrbaugh (1998) 46.
[320] Barclay (1987) 84-5 mentions seven criteria.

3.5 Conclusion

In this chapter, we have attempted to set forth our assumptions regarding the various contexts of FG.

First, we have argued that the probable historical context was a post-70 C.E. climate warmed by the emergence of Rabbinic Judaism. Non-believing Jews who had been influenced by Yavnean reforms could have viewed the theology presented by FG as offensive. Just how offensive Johannine theology was, whether Johannine claims could have been viewed as blasphemous, will be taken up in chapters 13-15.

Second, on sociological grounds, we have argued that FG reflects a *Sitz im Leben* in which there was intense conflict between non-believing Jews and Johannine Jews. The conflict stemmed from the fact that both groups were in a close relationship and yet the Johannine group made claims that were unacceptable to other Jews. Certain narratological distancing strategies employed by the author of FG underscores that a process of separation between the two groups *was underway* even at the time of the final writing of the Gospel. What mechanism was forcing the Johannine Jews out of the synagogue is debated. Of course, J. Louis Martyn has argued that certain Jews used the *Birkat ha-minim* to smoke out heretics, but this is problematic (see chapter 1). Instead, we contend that Johannine Jews, who were still in a very close relationship with other Jews, could have been identified as blasphemers (see chapter 13-15) and perhaps, on that basis, driven from the synagogue (see chapters 16).

Third, we have contended that the literary context of FG is replete with juridical motifs and language that echoes aspects of the 'covenant lawsuit' in Second Isaiah. This juridical tone of FG is congruent with a *Sitz im Leben* in which members of the Johannine group were undergoing harsh trials. As such, FG could have functioned as counter propaganda against whatever charges the Johannine group was encountering, perhaps the charge of blasphemy.

Fourth, we recognize that we will engage in mirror reading FG. There are pitfalls to this approach, but there are also safeguards, which we intend to take along the way.

CHAPTER 4
ΒΛΣΦΗΜΕΩ AND ITS SEMANTIC RELATIONS

One more preliminary task remains: to provide an analysis of selected Greek terms that can be translated with the English words *blasphemy, blaspheme,* or *blasphemous,* terms which comprise the semantic domain labeled "Insult, Slander" by Louw and Nida.[321] The analysis of the terms' range of meanings and relationships provides a semantic orientation to blasphemy before engaging selected early Jewish and Christian traditions that deal with blasphemy (chapters 5-12).

In this chapter, we will briefly review two approaches to semantic analysis and then, drawing on these two approaches, proceed to describe the semantic relationships between five verbs—βλασφημέω, δυσφημέω, κακολεγέω, καταλαλέω, and λοιδορέω—and their cognate forms.

4.1 Two Approaches to Semantic Analysis

Although there are a variety of types of semantic analyses,[322] we will draw on two complementary approaches: a field-oriented approach and role-oriented approach.

First, we employ a *field-oriented approach,* which emphasizes sense-relationships or how the sense of one word relates to the senses of other words. As John Lyons has argued, "No word can be fully understood independently of other words that are related to it and delimit its sense."[323] An analogy that illuminates this approach is the color spectrum. We know what red is only in contrast to other hues on the color spectrum—red is not blue, not violet, etc. Similarly, most words belong to a field or spectrum of similar terminology. A 'cup' belongs to the same semantic field as

[321] See the *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament Based on Semantic Domains* by Johannes P. Louw and Eugene A. Nida (1989) 433-35.

[322] Lyon (1996) 40-1 lists six basic approaches, including referential (or denotational) theory, ideational (or mentalistic) theory, behaviourist theory, meaning-is-use theory, verficationist theory, and truth-conditional theory. Lyons (1996) 41 states, "None othe these [approaches], in my view, will serve alone as the basis for a comprehensive and empirically well-motivated theory of lingusitic semantics."

[323] Lyons (1981) 75 as quoted by Cotterell and Turner (1989) 155.

'mug,' 'glass,' 'bowl,' and 'pitcher' with each item having a slight distinction from the others. This is important because distinguishing one related word from another is part of gaining linguistic competence.

Sense-relationships in this approach are distinguished in two ways:[324] (a) A *paradigmatic* (*substitutional*) sense-relationship refers to the ability of certain terms to be substituted for each other within a sentence; for example, "Pour the liquid out of the *bowl*" makes as much sense as "Pour the liquid out of the *cup*," because both *bowl* and *cup* are in a paradigmatic sense-relationship. Words in this type of relationship can be described in terms of their synonymy, contiguity, hyponymy, and antonymy.[325] (b) A *syntagmatic* (*combinatorial* or *collocational*) sense-relationship refers to the relationship between words within the same sentence. The sense linked to a word allows it to join in a sentence with some types of words but not others. For example, the syntagmatic relationship of the words, "Pour Sunday into the cup," is meaningless even though the sentence is grammatically correct, because the different senses of the words prohibit their combination. In section 4.2, we describe the paradigmatic sense-relationships among the various terms that we selected for study.

Second, we will also use a *role-oriented approach*.[326] This is a type of syntagmatic analysis that attempts to understand the sense that a word has by assessing its relationship with other words in a sentence.[327] Consider, for example, the sentence, 'The girl moved the stone on top of the hole with a shovel.' The verb, *moved*, describes the action and determines how each of the referring expressions in the sentence relate to each other. The role taken by the *girl*, technically known as the *agent*, performs the action. The entity affected by the action is known as the *theme* or the *patient* which, in this example, is the *stone*. If an agent uses another entity to

[324] Lyons (1995) 124-5; Silva (1994) 119-20; Cotterell and Turner (1989) 155-6.

[325] See Yule (1996) 118-23; Silva (1994) 119-35; Cotterell and Turner (1989) 156-61.

[326] The term, "role-oriented approach," is from Yule (1996) 116-17. This approach focuses more on sentence semantics (rather than simply lexical semantics). It is termed a "thematic role" or "theta-role" approach by Saeed (1997) 139-71, who notes that there are many other terms for this approach.

[327] See Yule (1996) 116-7 and Hurford and Heasley (1983) 219-31.

perform the action, in this case a *shovel*, that entity is known as the *instrument.*[328] Other role-relationships can be delineated,[329] but in section 4.3 we focus on the patient, agent, and instrument as a framework for our analysis.

These two approaches help structure our analysis and shape the type of questions we ask. For each text in which key terms occur, we ask: What is the patient, agent, instrument, and contextual associations? Does the patient or the agent of the verbal action distinguish the sense of one term from another? Can different sense-relationships be distinguished on the basis of instrumentality? Can attendant actions or other contextual features be used to distinguish the lexical senses of terms?

4.2 βλασφημέω and Related Terms

As a point of departure, we begin with the work of Louw and Nida, who have produced a lexicon arranged according to 93 semantic domains (paradigmatic fields), each with varying numbers of subdomains.[330] Some of the major semantic domains include: *Plants* (Domain 3), *Linear Movement* (Domain 15), *Memory and Recall* (Domain 29), *Military Activity* (Domain 55), and *Time* (Domain 67). Within the domain for *Communication* (Domain 33), a subdomain labeled *Insult, Slander* (Subdomain P': 33.387-33.403) lists terms that share semantic features with βλασφημέω and its cognates. Thus, subdomain P' provides a basic list of terms that are in close semantic relationship with βλασφημέω. Although Subdomain P' lists seventeen entries, the followingfourteen are relevant for our purposes:[331]

1. καταλαλέω; καταλαλιά, ας, ἡ
2. κατάλαλος, οῦ, ὁ
3. ὀνειδίζω; ὀνειδισμός, οῦ, ὁ
4. ὑβρίζω[b]; ἐνυβρίζω

[328] Saeed (1997) 145-47 notes that these are semantic, not grammatical categories (such as object, subject, and indirect object). It is possible, for instance, for the agent to be distinct from the subject of a verb as in the sentence *Jesus was raised from the dead.* Although *Jesus* is the subject, God is the agent.

[329] Saeed (1997) 140-41 lists nine different roles: *agent, patient, theme, experiencer, beneficiary, intrument, location, goal, and source.*

[330] Louw and Nida (1989). For a critique of Louw and Nida's approach and resultant lexicon, see J. Lee (1992) 167-89. For a response to Lee, see Louw (1993) 139-48.

[331] We omitted the rare expression, ἐκβάλλω τὸ ὄνομα, which occurs once in Lk 6:22, and the term διάβολος, which only occurs in the noun form ('the devil') in the NT and LXX and once in a vice-list in Philo (*Sacr.* 32).

5. ὕβρις[c], εως, ἡ
6. ὑβριστής[b], ου, ὁ
7. λοιδορέω; λοιδορία, ας, ἡ
8. λοίδορος, ου, ὁ
9. δυσφημέω; δυσφημία, ας, ἡ
10. κακολογέω
11. βλασφημέω; βλασφημία[a] , ας, ἡ
12. βλασφημία[b], ας, ἡ
13. βλάσφημος, ον
14. βλάσφημος, ου, ὁ

According to Louw and Nida, the list is broadly hierarchical, moving from the most general (καταλαλέω) to the most specific (βλάσφημος) meanings.[332] Moreover, certain terms have a superscript letter, indicating homonyms.[333] Thus, βλασφημία has two distinct meanings (both within Subdomain P') and ὑβρίζω has two distinct meanings (one in Subdomain P' and the other in a completely different Domain and Subdomain [88.130]).

However, Louw and Nida's work is not sufficient for our purposes, since their lexicon focuses entirely on the NT. In order to provide a broader basis for a Jewish-Christian lexical meaning of blasphemy, we expanded the database to include the LXX, NT, Philo, and Josephus. However, after looking at hundreds of texts that used either the verbal or nominal forms of βλασφημέω, δυσφημέω, κακολογέω, κακῶς λαλεῖν, καταλαλέω, λοιδορέω, ὀνειδίζω, and ὑβρίζω and, attempting to draw limits or boundaries to this study, we have selected the following five terminological word-groups as representative of the semantic field:

1. βλσαφημέω; βλασφημία, ας, ἡ; βλασφηος, ον
2. δυσφημέω; δυσφημία, ας, ἡ; δύσφημος, ον
3. κακολογέω; κἀκολογία, ας, ἡ; κἀκολόγος, ον
4. καταλαλέω; κακῶς λαλεῖν; καταλαλία, ας, ἡ; κατάλαλος, ου, ὁ
5. λοιδορέω; συνλοιδορέω; λοιδορία, ας, ἡ; λοίδορος, ον

We have carefully examined every occurrence—293 texts in all—of these terms in the LXX, NT, Philo, and Josephus.[334] Our analysis treats verbs and their cognates together as a terminological-semantic group, since they share the same core or

[332] Louw and Nida (1989) vi-vii recognize that their hierarchical structures are rather general, since it is not possible to take into consideration all of the possible relationships and meanings involved.

[333] Louw and Nida (1989) vii.

essential meaning, though verbs, nouns, adjectives, and adverbs have different grammatical functions.[335] Therefore, for each terminological-semantic group, we (a) identify significant syntagmatic role-relationships (role-oriented approach), (b) describe essential and stereotypical senses or lexical concepts (concept-oriented approach), and (c) sketch their paradigmatic relationships (field-oriented approach).

4.2.1 Βλασφημέω

Βλασφημέω is often translated *to blaspheme* or *to revile.* There are a total of 169 occurrences of βλασφημέω and its cognates in the LXX, NT, Philo, and Josephus.[336] The verb, βλασφημέω, occurs 9 times in LXX, 34 times in NT, 10 times in Philo, and 40 times in Josephus. The noun, Βλασφημία, ας, ἡ, occurs 7 times in the LXX, 18 times in the NT, 11 times in Philo, and 24 times in Josephus. The adjective, βλάσφημος, ον, occurs 6 times in the LXX, 4 times in the NT, twice in Philo, and 4 times in Josephus.

As we hope to show, the lexical sense of βλασφημέω is much richer than a single gloss or a one-word translation can provide.[337] We can tell something about the sense of βλασφημ-root words by the role-relationships they have with other words in various contexts.

We begin by identifying the patients of βλασφημ-root words. Of the 169 occurrences in our database, about 27% of the occurrences (45 of 169 times) the patient is God[338] or the 'Name of God.'[339] In about 12% of the occurrences (20 of 169 times), the

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[334] Our data is based on the TLG; Rengstorf (1973-83); Borgen, Fuglseth, and Skarsten (2000); and the *Concordance to the Novem Testamentum Graece* (1987).

[335] See the comments by Louw and Nida (1989) x, xii-xiii. For example, the verb εὐχαριστέω and its cognate noun εὐχαριστία can both denote the same event of *giving thanks*; the part of speech employed by a writer depends largely on stylistic features. A good example of this is θ' Dan 3:96, which uses the verb βλασφημέω, and LXX Dan 3:96, which uses the noun βλασφημία.

[336] Regarding our database, see note 334.

[337] We will use the lexical form for the Greek terms rather than what might be considered the appropriate inflected form. This is to reinforce the notion that we are discussing the *sense* of the lexeme, whatever forms it takes, and not the incidental meanings that various case endings contribute.

[338] E.g., 2 Kgs 19:4, 6, 22; LXX Dan 3:96 and θ' Dan 3:96; Mk 2:7; Jn 10:33; Acts 6:11; Rev 16:11; *Fug.* 84; *Mos.* 2.206; *Decal.* 63; *Legat.* 368; *A.J.* 4.202; *A.J.* 6.183.

[339] We have taken the expression *the name of God* as a figure of speech or metonymy for God himself. Instances of blaspheming the 'Name' include Isa 52.5; Rom 2:24; 1 Tim 6:1, 4; Jam 2:7; Rev 13:6; 16:9; 2 Macc 8:4. Since blasphemy came to be restricted to 'blaspheming the Name'—i.e.,

patient is not identified.[340] In about 6.5% of the occurrences (11 of 169 times), certain gods, goddesses or glorious beings are the patient of βλασφημέω.[341] Less frequently, other patients of βλασφημέω can be identified, including Moses,[342] the Jewish people,[343] Jews and their customs,[344] the Temple,[345] Josephus,[346] Jesus,[347] the word (teaching) of the Lord,[348] Paul,[349] the way,[350] Christians,[351] and certain kings and governors,[352] and others. Lastly, we should note that the sense of βλασφημέω allows it to take both animate (e.g., Jesus) and inanimate (e.g., the Temple) patients.

With respect to the agents of βλασφημέω, only one pattern emerges: neither God nor his holy angels are ever accused of being, or described as, agents of βλασφημέω.[353] In contrast, there is a whole range of alleged agents of βλασφημέω, including Sennacherib, Antiochus Epiphanes, the nations, Jesus, Temple guards, people witnessing the crucifixion of Jesus, certain Jews, Paul, Christians, and the Beast, to name a few.

When we turn to the instrument or means by which βλασφημέω is performed, some significant patterns can be detected. In about 65% of the occurrences (110 of 169

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vocalizing the proper Name of God—in rabbinic tradition (e.g., *m. Sanh.* 7.5), it is important to note that early Jewish and Christians traditions preserved in Greek have a much broader range of application for βλασφημέω.

[340] E.g., TobS 1:18; Mk 7:22; Acts 26:11; Eph 4:31; 1 Tim 1:13, 20; *Decal.* 86, 93; 2 Macc 10:35; Sir 3:16; Wis 1:6.

[341] E.g., θ' Bel 1:8; Acts 19:37; 2 Pet 2:10; Jude 1:8; *Conf.* 154; *Mos.* 2.205; *Somn.* 2.131; *A.J.* 4.207; *C.Ap.* 2.237.

[342] E.g., *B.J.* 2.145, 252; *A.J.* 3.207; *C.Ap.* 1.279; Acts 6:11.

[343] E.g., 2 Macc 15:24; *A.J.* 3.180; *A.J.* 6.177; *A.J.* 18.257; *C.Ap.* 1.4, 59.

[344] E.g., 2 Macc 2:6, 10:4 (implied); *Legat.* 169.

[345] E.g., 2 Macc 2:6, 10:4 (implied); *A.J.* 12.406. Cf. the accusations against Stephen for λαλῶν ῥήματα κατὰ τοῦ τόπου τοῦ ἁγίου τούτου καὶ τοῦ νόμου (Acts 6:13).

[346] E.g., *Vita* 232, 245, 158, 230; *B.J.* 2.637, 3.439, 5.375, 5.393; *C.Ap.* 1.2

[347] E.g., Matt 12:31 (implied), 27:39; Mk 3:28 (implied), 15:29; Lk 22:65;

[348] E.g., Acts 13:45; 1 Tim 6:1; Tit 2.5;

[349] E.g., Acts 18:6; 1 Cor 10:30.

[350] E.g., 2 Pet 2.2.

[351] E.g., Rom 3:8; 1 Pet 4:4 (implied).

[352] E.g., Agrippa (*Vita* 407), David (*A.J.* 7.207, 7.265, 7.388), Achab (*A.J.* 8.358), Joram (*A.J.* 9.118), Cumanus (*A.J.* 20.110), Antipater (*B.J.* 1.603), Tiberius Alexander (*B.J.* 2.493), Caesar (*B.J.* 5.458), Flaccus (*Flac.* 142), Hyrcanus (*A.J.* 13.293-296), Herod (*A.J.* 16.210-11), and rival high priests (*A.J.* 20.213).

[353] Cf. 2 Pet 2:9-11 where the possibility that God or the glorious ones could be agents of slander is rejected by the writer of 2 Peter.

times), the context indicates that saying or writing something performs the offense.[354] Thus, βλασφημέω *is primarily a verbal offense*.[355] However, in about 29% of the occurrences (49 of 169 times), the cause is not identified. In the remainder, about 6% of occurrences, βλασφημέω can refer to *non-verbal offenses* as well.[356] For example, βλασφημέω against God can be performed by (a) a combination of words, gestures, and attitudes,[357] (b) doubting God's power to save Israel,[358] (c) killing Israelites,[359] (d) failing to keep the law,[360] (e) profaning the Temple and the Sabbaths, plundering Jerusalem, erecting a desolating sacrilege, destroying the books of the law,[361] (f) suppressing Judaism and torturing Jews,[362] and (g) drinking out of the sacred cups of the Temple.[363]

When we look at the immediate context for attendant actions or events that coincide with the use of βλασφημ-root words, additional patterns appear. The most significant attendant action is the threat (or portent) of death against those accused of βλασφημέω against God, including Sennacherib,[364] the Edomites,[365] Antiochus Epiphanes,[366] Timothy's army,[367] certain Gentiles,[368] Nicanor and his army,[369] Daniel,[370] Naboth,[371] Benhadad,[372] Baltasar,[373] anyone speaking evil about God,[374] certain proselytes to Judaism,[375] Jesus,[376] and Stephen.[377] Not surprisingly, another

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[354] There are several instances where βλασφημία is expressed in written form; e.g., Rev 13:1, 17:3; *Vita* 245, 260; *C.Ap.* 1.59, 1.221-123;

[355] Our use of the term *verbal* includes both oral and written communication.

[356] This is supported by Bock (1998) 30, 46, 50.

[357] E.g., 2 Kgs 19:22, 28; Matt 27:39.

[358] E.g., 2 Kgs 19:4; Isa 52:5, 7.

[359] E.g., TobS 1:18.

[360] E.g., Rom 2:23-25.

[361] E.g., 1 Macc 2:6-9; cf 1 Macc 1:21-56.

[362] E.g., 1 Macc 8:2-4.

[363] E.g., *A.J.* 10.233.

[364] 2 Kgs 19:7.

[365] Ezek 35:8-9, 12-13.

[366] 2 Macc 9:28.

[367] 2 Macc 10:37.

[368] 2 Macc 12:16.

[369] 2 Macc 15:24.

[370] Bel 1:5.

[371] *A.J.* 8.358-359.

[372] *A.J.* 8.392.

[373] *A.J.* 10.233; cf. 10.241.

[374] *Fug.* 84; *Mos.* 2.206-208.

[375] *Spec.* 1.53.

[376] Mk 14:64; Jn 10:33.

attendant action that coincides with the use of βλασφημ-root words is stoning.[378] In this regard, Josephus captures a crucial Jewish sentiment when he writes, "Let him that blasphemeth God be stoned, then hung for a day and buried ignominiously in obscurity."[379] In addition, on certain occasions, the attendant actions make it clear that βλασφημ-root words can have the connotation of cursing,[380] speaking evil,[381] shaming[382] or dishonoring someone,[383] displaying arrogance,[384] despising authority,[385] betrayal or treason,[386] and misrepresenting the truth.[387]

At this point, we can provide a description or definition of βλασφημέω. This follows the tradition of Louw and Nida, who not only structure their lexicon according to semantic fields, but also provide definitions based on distinctive semantic features. Louw and Nida define βλασφημέω, βλασφημία, ας as "to speak against someone in such a way as to harm or injure his or her reputation (occurring in relation to persons as well as to divine beings)."[388] Based on our survey, which goes beyond the database of Louw and Nida's, we propose a similar definition of βλασφημέω: *to denigrate falsely, insult or abuse someone or something in an arrogant manner either verbally or non-verbally.* We should also note that typical uses of βλασφημ-root words also include the sense of *making slanderous or untrue accusations about someone with evil or malicious intent* and, when God is the patient, βλασφημ-root words have the sense of *being a grave offense deserving deadly punishment.* As we introduce more

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[377] Acts 6:11; cf. 7:58.

[378] E.g., *A.J.* 4.202; *A.J.* 8.358; *A.J.* 20.175-176; Jn 10:36 (cf. 10:38); Acts 6:11-14 (cf. 7:8).

[379] *A.J.* 4.202 (Loeb).

[380] Κατάρα and καταράομαι characterize βλασφημεῖν in *Migr.* 115-117 and *Mos.* 2.203-204, 206.

[381] Κακηγορία and κακηγορέω qualifies βλασφημεῖν in *Conf.* 154; *Fug.* 84; *Spec.* 4.197-198.

[382] E.g., φθέγγεσθαί τι τῶν αἰσχρῶν, *uttering words of shame,* portrays βλασφημία in *Decal.* 93.

[383] E.g., τὸν θεόν ἀτιμάζεις, *you dishonor God,* is explained as τὸ γὰρ ὄνομα τοῦ θεοῦ δι' ὑμᾶς βλασφημεῖται, *for the name of God is blasphemed because of you* (Rom 3:23-24). Also see *Spec.* 1.53; *A.J.* 6.177; *B.J.* 2.145-146.

[384] E.g., στρῆνός characterizes βλασφημέω in 2 Kgs 19:22; see also *Somn.* 2.129-131; *A.J.* 4.215; *A.J.* 10.233; *C.Ap.* 1.221-123.

[385] E.g., 2 Pet 2:9-11; Jude 1:8; Mk 14:62-64

[386] E.g., *Vita* 407; *A.J.* 9.118; *B.J.* 2.152-153; *B.J.* 3.439.

[387] E.g., Rom 14:16; *Legat.* 169; 2 Macc 15:5-6, 15.24; *C.Ap.* 1.4, 1.221-123; *Vita* 260; *A.J.* 13.294.

[388] Louw and Nida (1989) 434, entry number 33.400.

terms (sections 4.2.2—4.2.5), we will identify the sense relationships between βλασφημέω and each of the other terms.

4.2.2 Δυσφημέω

Δυσφημέω can be translated *to blaspheme* or *to threaten evil.* There are a total of 10 occurrences of δυσφημέω and its cognates in the LXX, NT, Philo, and Josephus.[389] Δυσφημ-root words are relatively rare in ancient Greek literature.[390] The verb, δυσφημέω, occurs once in the LXX and once in the NT. The noun, δυσφημία, ας, occurs twice in the LXX, once in the NT, once in Philo, and once in Josephus. The adjective, δύσφημος, ον, occurs twice in the LXX, once in Philo, and once in Josephus.

When we turn to an analysis of the patients of δύσφημ-root word, our survey reveals that it can take both animate and inanimate patients. In 50% of the occurrences (5 of 10 times), the patient is the Temple.[391] Considering how rarely the term is used, it is noteworthy that δυσφημέω is used with high frequency to characterize threats toward the Temple. Likewise, of the two occurrences of δυσφημέω in Josephus, once the patient is Jerusalem, which is, of course, the city of the Temple,[392] and once it is the sons of Herod.[393] The patients of δυσφημέω also include the Jewish community (once),[394] Jewish laws, Jerusalem, Judea, and the commonwealth of Jews (once),[395] and Paul and the apostles (once).[396] Significantly, God is never the patient of δυσφημέω in the LXX, NT, Philo, Josephus, or even Epictetus.[397]

When we turn to the agent of δυσφημέω, it is not surprising that God is never identified as the agent. However, a number of figures are numbered among the

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[389] Regarding our database, see note 334.

[390] The TLG reveals only 51 occurrences of δυσφημέω in extant literature between the 2nd century B.C.E. and the 1st century C.E.

[391] See 1 Macc 7:38, 41; 2 Macc 13:11; 15:32; possibly *B.J.* 2.650.

[392] *B.J.* 2.650.

[393] *A.J.* 16.90.

[394] 3 Macc 2:26.

[395] 2 Macc 13:11; cf. 13:14.

[396] 1 Cor 4:13.

[397] Epictetus uses δυσφημ-root words eight times in total—all occurring in *Diatr.* 3.24.89-3.24.91—with people as the patients of insult.

agents of δυσφημέω, including Nicanor or his messenger (3 of 10 times),[398] Gaius (once),[399] Philopater (once),[400] Herod (once),[401] Gentiles affiliated with Antiochus Eupator (once),[402] Romans (once),[403] and certain unidentified individuals (twice).[404]

When we look for the instrument of δυσφημέω, 70% of the occurrences (7 of 10 times) indicate that the written or spoken word is the primary way in which the offense is performed.[405] In one notable instance, δυσφημία is performed by Nicanor's "outstretched arm" along with certain verbal threats against the Temple,[406] which is confirmed by the fact that not only was Nicanor's tongue cut out, but also his offending arm was cut off.[407] And, in two instances, the instrument of δυσφημία is not identified.[408] Even more than βλασφημέω, δυσφημέω is primarily a verbal offense, but on certain occasions, δυσφημέω is performed by non-verbal actions.

Once we look for attendant actions and settings coinciding with δυσφημέω, two patterns emerge. First, δυσφημέω is frequently accompanied by expressions such as *speaking evil* (κακῶς λάλησεν),[409] *speaking arrogantly* (ἐλάλησεν περηφάνως),[410] *with such audacity* (ἐπὶ τοσοῦτον θράσους),[411] *barbarous arrogance* (φρονήμασιν ... βεβαρβαρωμένος),[412] and *he boasted highly* (ἐμεγαλαύχησεν).[413] Rather than contributing distinctive meanings, these expressions of arrogant and evil speech seem to, by means of redundancy, reinforce the sense of δυσφημέω. Redundancy is a common way in which writers try to reduce errors of reception.[414] Second, δυσφημέω tends to carry a cultic connotation, which is supported by (a) the

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[398] 1 Macc 7:38, 41; 2 Macc 15:32.
[399] *Legat.* 101.
[400] 3 Macc 2.:26.
[401] *A.J.* 16:90.
[402] 2 Macc 13:11.
[403] *B.J.* 2.650.
[404] E.g., 1 Cor 4:13; 2 Cor 6:8.
[405] 1 Macc 7:38; 1 Macc 7:41; 2 Macc 15:32; 3 Macc 2:26; *Legat.* 101a; 1 Cor 4:13; 2 Cor 6:8.
[406] 2 Macc 15:32; cf. 14:33.
[407] 2 Macc 15:30, 33.
[408] *A.J.* 16:90; 2 Macc 13:11.
[409] 1 Macc 7:42; cf. 7:41.
[410] 1 Macc 7:34; cf. 7:41.
[411] 3 Macc 2:26.
[412] 2 Macc 13:11.
[413] 2 Macc 15:32.
[414] Reed (1995) 226.

proportionate number of times the patient of δυσφημέω is the Temple, (b) Josephus, who links *one who practices divination* (θειασμοι) with δυσφημέω,[415] (c) lexicographers who regularly translate δυσφημία as *words of ill omen,*[416] and (d) the use of δυσφημέω in 3 Macc 2:26-29, which pertains to Philopater's malicious institution of pagan sacrifices for Jews and an interruption of Jewish gatherings in their ιερα or *sanctuaries.*

Taking these observations into consideration, we can now provide a description or definition of δυσφημέω. Our survey indicates that Louw and Nida's definition of δυσφημέω, δυσφημία, ας as "to attribute ill repute or bad reputation to"[417] holds true not only for the NT, but also generally reflects the usage in LXX, Josephus, and Philo. However, to better reflect LXX, Josephus, and Philo, we would expand that definition only slightly; δυσφημέω is *to attribute evil, ill-fate, ill-omen, or a bad reputation to someone or something.*[418] In addition, typical uses of δυσφημ-root words include the sense of slandering or attributing evil in *an arrogant or boastful manner,* often with *a cultic connotation.*

Now we are in a position to sketch the paradigmatic relationship between δυσφημέω and βλασφημέω, which we characterize as *partially synonymous* (see Diagram A). On the one hand, both share some semantic features. Both have the sense of speaking against someone or something; both are primarily verbal offenses; and both attribute arrogance to the speaker. On the other hand, the two terms have semantic features that do not overlap. The offense of βλασφημέω is more severe than δυσφημέω, because the penalty of death is often an attendant consequence of βλασφημέω, but not of δυσφημέω. In addition, God can be the patient (but is never the agent) of βλασφημέω; in contrast, God is never directly a patient (or the agent) of δυσφημέω. Furthermore, βλασφημέω is more likely to be used to describe non-verbal offensives than δυσφημέω. Therefore, βλασφημέω and δυσφημέω are *partially synonymous.*

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[415] *B.J.* 2.650.
[416] Liddell & Scott (1889) and W. A. Oldfather, the translator of Epictetus (Loeb).
[417] Louw and Nida (1989) 434, entry number 33.398.

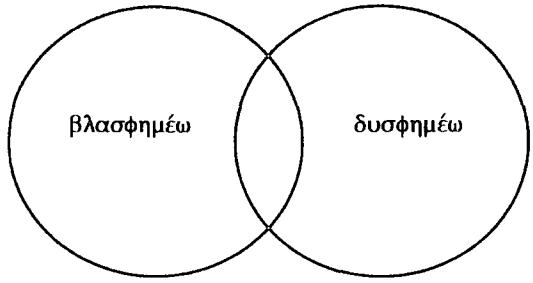

Diagram A:
Partial Synonymy

4.2.3 Κακολογέω

Κακολογέω can be translated *to speak evil against* or *to curse* someone. There are a total of 18 occurrences of κακολογέω and its cognates in the LXX, NT, and Josephus.[419] There are no occurrences in Philo. The verb, κακολογέω, occurs 6 times in the LXX, 4 times in the NT, and once in Josephus. The adverbial expression, κακῶς λαλεῖν, occurs once in LXX and once in NT. The adverbial expression, κακῶς λεγεῖν, occurs 5 times in the LXX. The adjective, κακολόγος, ον, and the noun, κακολογία, ας, ἡ, do not occur in the LXX, NT, Philo, or Josephus.

When we examine the patients of κακολογέω, an immediate pattern emerges. Of the 18 instances, 16 times the patient of κακολογέω is animate and twice the patient is an inanimate object. Of the 16 animate patients, 15 are symbols or persons of authority (ca. 83% of the total occurrences), including God (twice),[420] father or mother (7 times),[421] the high priest (3 times),[422] leaders of Israel (once),[423] kings and gods (once),[424] and Jesus (once).[425] Only once—a reference to disabled people[426]—is the animate patient not an authority figure; however, even here, it is out of fear of

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[418] E.g., 1 Macc 7:41 (cf. 7:42); 2 Cor 6:8. Epictetus, *Diatr.* 3.24.90 provides a definition: σὺ δὲ δύσφημα καλεῖς ἄλλα ἢ τὰ κακοῦ τινὸς σημαντικά; *But do you call any things ill-omened except those which signify some evil for us?*

[419] Regarding our database, see note 334. In our data base for κακολογέω, we have included five instances of κακῶς λαλεῖν and two instances of κακῶς λεγεῖν, both of which function as adverbial forms of κακολογεῖν; e.g., see the interchangeability of κακολογεῖν and κακῶς λαλεῖν in Exod 21:16 and Lev 20:9.

[420] Exod 22:27 and 1 Sam 3:13.

[421] Exod 21:16; Lev 20:9 (twice); Prov 20:9; Ezek 22:7; Matt 15:4; Mk 7:10.

[422] 2 Macc 4:1; *A.J.* 20.180; Jn 18:23.

[423] Exod 22:27.

[424] Isa 8:21.

[425] Mk 9:39.

[426] Lev 19:14.

God that one is not to speak evil of the disabled (Lev 19:14) and thus it is linked to authority. Of the two inanimate patients, one is "the way"[427] and the other is "the Temple," both of which could symbolize divine authority.[428] It is also worth noting that the only occurrence of κακολογέω in Josephus happens in the context of two rival groups claiming the authority of the high priest (*A.J.* 20.180). Thus, an examination of the patients of κακολογέω reveals that it predominantly expresses contempt for authority.

Turning to the issue of agency, it is not surprising that God is never identified as the agent of κακολογέω given what we have discovered about the patients of κακολογέω. This might be explained by the notion that God, as the highest authority, has no one to rebel against. Conversely, 66% of the occurrences (12 of 18 times) the people of Israel, or "anyone" from among Israel, are identified as the agent or potential agent of κακολογέω.[429] Other specific agents that are mentioned include the sons of Eli (1 Sam 3:13), certain Jews in the synagogue of Ephesus (Acts 19:9), the high priests (*A.J.* 20.180), people who consult mediums (Isa 8:21), and Nicanor (1 Macc 7:42). It is noteworthy that in the so-called Jewish trial in FG, Jesus defends himself against the same charge of "speaking wickedly" before the high priest in Jn 18:23.[430]

When we look for dominant patterns regarding the instrument of κακολογέω, it is apparent that in 94% of the occurrences (17 of 18 times) the offense is performed by speech itself. The one remaining instance concerns the sons of Eli, who are accused of κακολογοῦντες θεὸν or "blaspheming God" (NRSV; 1 Sam 3:13). Nothing in the immediate text indicates how they blasphemed God. However, they gave false and self-serving *instruction*—suggesting that the offense was verbal—about the laws of sacrifice (1 Sam 15-17), which is subsequently interpreted as "setting aside the

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[427] Acts 19:9.

[428] 1 Macc 7:42.

[429] E.g., Exod 2:16; 22:27 (twice); Lev 19:14; Lev 20:9; Prov 20:9; Isa 8:21; Ezek 22:7; Matt 15:4; Mk 7:10; Mk 9:39; *Alleg. Interp.* 2.78.

[430] "Jesus answered him, 'If I have *spoken wickedly* (κακῶς ἐλάλησα), bear witness of that evil; but if I have spoken well, why do you strike me?'" (Jn 18:23); see § 14.2.1(9).

sacrifices of the Lord," ἠθέτουν τὴν θυσίαν κορίου (1 Sam 2:15-17) and "despising me [God]," ἐξουθενῶν με (1 Sam 2:30).

Regarding actions that coincide with the use of κακολογέω, there is one conspicuous set of associations. In about 61% of the occurrences (11 of 18 times), the death sentence is prescribed (e.g., Exod 21:16; 1 Sam 3:13), or death is the result (e.g., 1 Macc 7:42-43), or some other harsh punishment follows (Ezek 22:7, 15). In fact, it seems that it was taken for granted that κακολογοῦντες against one's parents was a capital offense (e.g., Prov 20:9; Mk 7:10).

At this point, we can offer a definition of κακολογέω. We generally agree with Louw and Nida that κακολογέω can be defined as "to insult in a particularly strong and unjustified manner."[431] However, our data indicates that we can go further; κακολογέω refers *to speaking evil against persons or symbols of authority* and, because the performance of κακολογέω frequently results in the death for the offender, κακολογέω is a *very severe offence.*

Now we can sketch the paradigmatic relationship between κακολογέω and βλασφημέω as *hyponymous* (see Diagram B). On the one hand, both share certain semantic features. Both take animate and inanimate patients. Both share the feature of being verbally offensive by attributing evil to or insulting someone or something. Both can result in deadly penalties for the offender. On the other hand, there are differences in stress and emphasis. For instance, κακολογέω is more likely to appear in contexts where persons or symbols of authority are being scorned than βλασφημέω; hence, κακολογέω seems to have a more restricted sense. In addition, κακολογέω is limited to verbal offenses, but βλασφημέω can be performed verbally or non-verbally. Thus, the lexical sense of βλασφημέω is more general and inclusive than κακολογέω and, as such, κακολογέω is a hyponym or type of βλασφημέω:

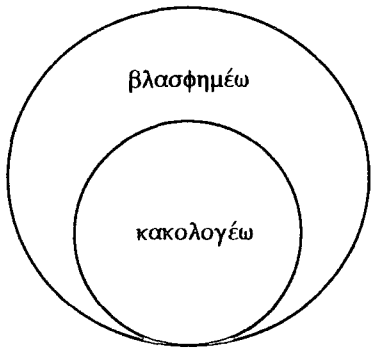

Diagram B: Hyponymy

4.2.4 Καταλαλέω

Καταλαλέω is often translated *to speak evil* or *to slander*. There are14 occurrences of καταλαλέω and its cognates in the LXX, NT, and Philo.[432] There are no occurrences in Josephus. The verb, καταλαλέω, occurs 5 times in the NT and 5 times in Philo. The noun, καταλαλιά, ας, ἡ, occurs once in the LXX and twice in the NT. The noun, κατάλαλος, ου, ὁ, occurs once in the NT.

There are a wide variety of patients for καταλαλ-root words. Of the 14 occurences, patients include Christians (3 times),[433] "anyone" (once),[434] the law (once),[435] Moses (twice),[436] God and Moses (3 times),[437] and unidentified individuals (4 times).[438] As we can see, the patient of καταλαλέω can be either animate (e.g., Moses) or inanimate (e.g., the law), which follows the pattern of βλασφημέω, δυσφημέω, and κακολογέω.

The agents of καταλαλέω are widely distributed among various types and classes of people. Of the 14 occurences, the agents of καταλαλέω includes "anyone" (twice),[439] Christians (3 times),[440] Gentiles (once),[441] Miriam (twice),[442] the people of Israel

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[431] Louw and Nida (1989) 434, entry number 33.399.
[432] Regarding our database, see note 334.
[433] Jas 4:11; 1 Pet 2:12; 1 Pet 3:16.
[434] Jas 4:11.
[435] Jas 4:11.
[436] *Alleg. Interp.* 2.66 and 2.67.
[437] *Alleg Interp.* 2.78 (thrice).
[438] Wis. 1:11; 2 Cor 12:20; 1 Pet 2:1; Rom 1:30.
[439] Jas 4:11 (twice).
[440] 2 Cor 12:20; Jas 4:11; 1 Pet 2:1.
[441] 1 Pet 2:12.
[442] *Alleg. Interp.* 2.66 and 2.67.

(three times),[443] people who do not acknowledge God (once),[444] and certain unidentified individuals (twice).[445]

It appears that the instrument of καταλαλέω is the tongue.[446] Although most texts do not explicitly identify the instrument of καταλαλέω, the sense of καταλαλέω seems to be restricted to a verbal offense for three reasons: (a) part of the root of καταλαλέω (-λαλ-) is associated with the sense of speaking, (b) when we assume that the instrument of καταλαλέω is speech, it is congruent with the texts in which the term occurs, and (c) in our data base there is no clear evidence to the contrary.

When we turn toward identifying attendant actions or circumstances coinciding with the use of καταλαλέω, no thoroughgoing trends emerge. Nevertheless, a few moderate tendencies can be observed. First, several times κακαλαλέω has the connotation of an unjustified accusation[447] or attributing evil to someone who is good.[448] In one instance, Philo writes that Miriam "dared to speak against [καταλαλεῖν] Moses and to accuse him for the very actions for which he deserved to be praised."[449] Second, the issue of honor and shame forms the backdrop in a few instances.[450] For example, as the author of 1 Peter wrote, "Conduct yourselves honorably among the Gentiles, so that, though they malign [καταλαλοῦσιν] you as evildoers, they may see your honorable deeds and glorify God when he comes to judge."[451] Third, although in most cases the consequences of καταλαλέω are not mentioned, in a couple of instances the act of καταλαλέω either leads to the destruction of the soul[452] or is considered worthy of death.[453] Fourth, καταλαλέω has

[443] *Alleg. Interp.* 2.78 (thrice).
[444] Rom 1:28.
[445] Wis 1:11 and 1 Pet 3:16.
[446] Wis 1:11.
[447] E.g., Jas 4:11.
[448] 1 Pet 2:12; 3:16.
[449] *Alleg. Interp.* 2.78 (Loeb).
[450] 1 Pet 2:12; 3:16; *Alleg. Interpr.* 2.66, 2.67.
[451] NRSV, 1 Pet 2:12.
[452] Wis 1:11.
[453] Rom 1:30; cf. 1:32.

the sense of falsely accusing.[454] Fifth, καταλαλέω is listed among the *vices* in contrast with virtue.[455]

Now we are in a position to offer a brief definition of καταλαλέω. For Louw and Nida, the definition of καταλαλέω is "to speak against, often involving speaking evil of."[456] We concur with Louw and Nida's definition as far as it goes, but our data suggests that καταλαλέω can also includes the sense of *attributing evil to someone unjustly* and *speaking in a dishonorable or shameful manner.*

At this point, we can sketch the paradigmatic relationship between καταλαλέω and βλασφημέω as *hyponymous* (see Diagram C). On the one hand, καταλαλέω and βλασφημέω share certain semantic features in common. Both share the sense of *speaking against someone.* In certain circumstances, both καταλαλέω and βλασφημέω result in death or a threat of death for the offender. In addition, both terms can imply that the abuse of the patient entailed false accusation or misrepresentation of the truth. On the other hand, the sense of καταλαλέω seems to be slightly more restricted than the sense of βλασφημέω. Whereas the instrument of βλασφημέω can be both verbal and non-verbal, καταλαλέω appears to be restricted to verbal abuse alone. Hence, the lexical sense of βλασφημέω is more general and inclusive of καταλαλέω; that is, καταλαλέω is a *hyponym* of βλασφημέω:

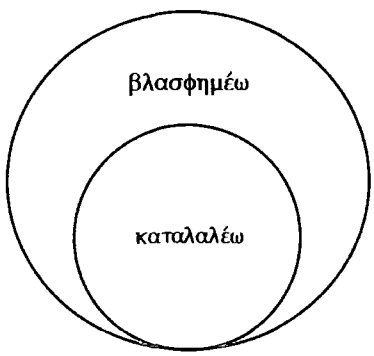

Diagram C: Hyponymy

[454] E.g., 1 Pet 2:12; *Alleg. Interp.* 2.78.
[455] E.g, *Alleg. Interp.* 2.78; 1 Pet 2:1; Rom 1:30.
[456] Louw and Nida (1989) 433, entry number 33.387.

4.2.5 Λοιδορέω

Λοιδορέω is frequently translated *to reproach* or *to abuse*. There are a total of 82 occurences of λοιδορέω and its cognates in the LXX, NT, Philo, and Josephus.[457] The verb, λοιδορέω, occurs 8 times in the LXX, 4 times in the NT, 4 times in Philo, and 25 times in Josephus. The verb, ἀντιλοιδορέω, occurs once in the NT and the verb, συνλοιδορέω, occurs once in the LXX. The noun, λοιδορία, ας, ἡ, occures 7 times in the LXX, 3 times in the NT, 4 times in Philo, and 21 times in Josephus. The noun, λοίδορος, ου, ὁ, occurs 4 times in the LXX.

The patients of λοιδορέω included a broad range of *animate* entities (80 of 82 times) and one *inanimate* entity—the law (2 of 82 times).[458] The animate patients of λοιδορέω are broadly distributed and include (in descending frequency): unidentified people (16 of 82 times),[459] the Jews (12 of 82 times),[460] Moses (9 of 82 times),[461] Herod the Great (5 of 82 times), God (twice), Pilate (twice),[462] Christ (twice),[463] Israelites quarrelling with each other (once),[464] the High Priest (once),[465] the man born blind (once),[466] Christians (once),[467] and others. It is noteworthy that God is the patient of λοιδορέω in only 2 of 82 occurences.

The agents of λοιδορέω include (in descending frequency): the Israelites (20 of 82 times),[468] unidentified persons (11 of 82 times),[469] Apion, who reproaches the Jews (9 of 82 times),[470] Greek historians, who reproach the Jews (4 of 82 times),[471] Paul, who is accused of reproaching the High Priest (once),[472] women in the market place

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[457] Regarding our database, see note 334.
[458] *C.Ap.* 2.144; *C.Ap.* 2.236-237.
[459] E.g., Gen 49:23; *Spec.* 3.174.
[460] E.g., *C.Ap.* 1.3, 2.114.
[461] E.g., Exod 17:2; *Hypoth.* 6.2.
[462] *A.J.* 18:61.
[463] E.g., 1 Pet 2:23.
[464] E.g., Exod 21:18.
[465] E.g., Acts 21:4-5.
[466] Jn 9:28.
[467] E.g., 1 Tim 5:14.
[468] E.g., Num 20:13; Deut 33:8; *A.J.* 18.61.
[469] E.g., 1 Cor 4:12; 1 Pet 2:23; *C.Ap.* 2.161.
[470] E.g., *C.Ap.* 2.142; 2.290;
[471] E.g., *C.Ap.* 1.220; 1.3.
[472] Acts 23:4-5.

(once),[473] Galileans, who reproach the people of Jerusalem (once),[474] Roman senators and Emperor Claudius, who reproach each other (once),[475] foolish lips (once) and the foolish (once),[476] men of ill temper (once),[477] the Adversary (once),[478] a mob in Alexandria (once),[479] and others. It seems that almost anyone can be an agent of λοιδορέω, but there are two notable exceptions: God is never the agent of λοιδορέω and 1 Peter expressly denies that Christ ever engaged in such reviling.[480]

When we look for the instrument of λοιδορέω, a clear pattern emerges. The instrument of λοιδορέω is the word. In about 17% of the occurrences (14 of 82 times), the instrument is the written word,[481] and in about 55% of the occurrences (14 of 82 times), the instrument is the spoken word.[482] However, about 28% percent of the time, the instrument of λοιδορέω is not identified or there is not enough contextual information to determine the instrument of λοιδορέω.[483] This leaves some uncertainty; however, since we find explicit or implicit indications that λοιδορέω was performed by non-verbal means, we conclude that λοιδορέω is a verbal (written or oral) offense.

When we look at actions associated with λοιδορέω, a few patterns emerge. First, λοιδορέω is used in contexts of mutual violence, where two disputants or parties trade verbal or physical blows,[484] garrisons are attacked,[485] riots break out,[486] bloodshed takes place,[487] and military combat ensues.[488] Philo even compares

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[473] *Spec.* 3.174.
[474] *Vita* 211.
[475] *A.J.* 19.260.
[476] Prov 10:18 and Prov 20:3 respectively.
[477] *C.Ap.* 2.144.
[478] 1 Tim 5:14.
[479] *Flacc.* 32-33.
[480] 1 Pet 2:23.
[481] E.g., *C.Ap.* 1.3; 1.220; 2.2, 2.30, 2.32, 2.34 (cf. 2.2).
[482] E.g., 2 Macc 12:14; cf. *Spec.* 3.174; *Flacc.* 32-33; Acts 23:4-5.
[483] E.g., Sir 27:21.
[484] Between men (*Spec.* 3.172-174), Israelites (Exod 21:18), members of Herod's household (e.g., *A.J.* 15.233; *A.J.* 17.37), Roman senators and soldiers (*A.J.* 19.260), and Josephus and John of Gischala (*B.J.* 6.98).
[485] 2 Macc 12:14.
[486] E.g., *A.J.* 18.61; *B.J.* 2.298-299;
[487] Sir 22:24.
[488] Prov 26:21.

λοιδοροῦντος with the blows and injuries inflicted by wrestlers and boxers[489] and speaks about *contests of abuse* (λοιδορίας ἅμιλλαν).[490] Second, λοιδορέω occurs in close association with verbs indicating abusive language, such as *blaspheming*,[491] *uttering words that are not to be spoken*,[492] *speaking evil*,[493] *using evil language*,[494] *speaking with contumelious words*,[495] *quarrelling*,[496] and *cursing*.[497] These associations confirm that the lexical sense of λοιδορέω entails the notion of verbal abuse.[498] Third, λοιδορέω occurs in contexts where honor and shame are at stake.[499] For example, if a borrower does not repay his debt, then the creditor will "repay him with curses and reproaches [λοιδορέω], and instead of glory will repay him with dishonor."[500] In this instance, the performance of λοιδορίας is an act of *dishonor* (ἀτιμία), rather than honor (δόξη).[501]

In view of the sense relationships we have just described, we can provide a definition of λοιδορέω. For Louw and Nida, the definition of λοιδορέω is "to speak in a highly insulting manner."[502] As with previous terms we have looked at, we concur with Louw and Nida, but offer a slightly expanded definition; λοιδορέω entails *speaking or writing against an opponent (a disputant) with evil or malicious intent.*

The paradigmatic sense-relationships between λοιδορέω and βλασφημέω can now be articulated as *partially synonymous* (see Diagram D). On the one hand, βλασφημέω and λοιδορέω share some semantic features. For instance, both λοιδορέω and βλασφημέω can take inanimate and animate patients. Both can have a

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[489] *Spec.* 3.174; cf. *Somn.* 2.167-168

[490] *Agr.* 110.

[491] Βλασφημοῦντες (2 Macc 12:14); βλασφημίαις (*Flacc.* 23-33).

[492] Λαλοῦντες ἃ μὴ θέμις (2 Macc 12:14).

[493] Ἐρεῖς κακῶς (Acts 21:4-5).

[494] Κακηγοροῦντος (*Spec.* 3.174); κακηγορεῖν (*Flacc.* 32-33).

[495] Προπηλακίζειν (*Spec.* 3.174).

[496] Συμπλέκετι (Prov 20:3).

[497] Κατάρας (Sir 29:6); κατάραις (*Decal.* 75); καταρωμένη (*B.J.* 6.203.

[498] The associations tend to shade the lexical sense of λοιδορέω, if we trust the *redundancy principle*; that is, that authors attempt to reduce miscommunication by using closely related words and expressions in the same context; see Reed (1995) 226.

[499] E.g., *C.Ap.* 1.220, 1.319, 2.30, 2.32-34, 2.49; *A.J.* 18.150, 18.180, *Agr.* 110; Sir 29:6

[500] NRSV Sir 29:6.

[501] Prov 20:3; Sir 29:6; *Agr.* 110.

[502] Louw and Nida (1989) 433, entry number 33.393.

wide variety of agents, but never God. Both are used to express verbal attacks between quarrelling people or hostile armies. Moreover, both λοιδορέω and βλασφημέω are primarily verbal offenses—the written or spoken word is the instrument of offense for 65% of all the occurrences of βλασφημέω and 72% of all the occurrences of λοιδορέω. On the other hand, βλασφημέω has some distinctive semantic features that λοιδορέω does not have. For example, βλασφημέω can be performed by non-verbal actions but, as far as we can discern, this is not so for λοιδορέω. Again, βλασφημέω appears to be a more severe offense than λοιδορέω. That is, βλασφημέω is often (33.5% of the time) used to refer to an offense against God or other deities and, as a consequence, the death penalty is associated with it. In contrast, λοιδορέω is rarely (2% of the time) used to refer to an offense against God and, although death may be associated with it,[503] the death penalty is not. When we consider the similarities and differences, we see that βλασφημέω and λοιδορέω have continuous sense relations; however, βλασφημέω is used more in religious contexts and λοιδορέω in more non-religious contexts. Hence, we describe βλασφημέω and λοιδορέω as *partially synonymous*:

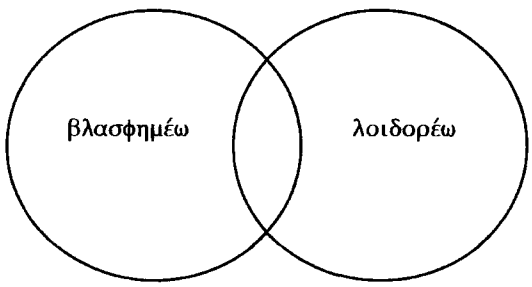

Diagram D:
Partial Synonymy

4.3 Conclusions

Here, we will not summarize the foregoing material, since the entire chapter has been an exercise in summarizing the semantic relationships of βλασφημέω and related lexemes. Here, we merely point out the benefits of the preceding analysis.

First, the preceding analysis reminds us that words have meaning only in relation to other words. Even though our analysis was limited to five lexemes and their

[503] E.g., Josephus believes that Apion died in great torment because of his reproaches (λοιδορία)

cognates, it provided a sample of words that share partially synonymous or hyponymous relations with βλασφημέω and, in this way, it rendered a type of semantic map or orientation for the remainder of our study on blasphemy.

Second, the preceding analysis demonstrates that the various senses of βλασφημέω are not limited to that term. Βλασφημέω shares semantic space with a broad range of other terms, even beyond the four other lexemes we discussed. As such, the preceding analysis frees us from the notion that only texts that use βλασφημέω are valid for the study of blasphemy.

Third, the preceding analysis alerts us to the fact that various partial synonyms and hyponyms of βλασφημέω can be used to express *blasphemy* with different emphases. So, for example, κακολογέω can be used to refer to *blasphemy,* while stressing the sense of *speaking evil of authority,* and λοιδορέω can refer to *blasphemy,* but do so by accentuating an element of *contending with an opponent.*

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against the Jews and their laws; cf. *C.Ap.* 2.142.

PART II

BLASPHEMY IN SELECTED EARLY JEWISH TEXTS

In Part II we use the concept of blasphemy articulated in chapter 4 to identify and evaluate seven key texts from selected early Jewish literature—Exod 22:27; Lev 24:10-23; Num 15:30-31; 2 Kgs 18:1—20:21; 1 Macc 1:41—2:14; 2 Macc 14:26-15:37; and Philo's *Dreams* 1.123-132—where it appears as though God is directly or indirectly blasphemed. For each text, we address two main questions—What is the discourse concept of blasphemy that emerges from the text? What is the penalty for blasphemy?

In Part II, we shift our focus from analyzing the *lexical meaning of blasphemy* (chapter 4), to examining the *discourse meanings of blasphemy* of key texts (Chapters 5-12). At this point, we also narrow our discussion from speaking about blasphemy in general to the more specific and significant issue of blasphemy against God. We conclude Part II with a *composite portrait of blasphemy* comprised of four strokes.

CHAPTER 5
MOSAIC LAW ON BLASPHEMY
EXODUS 22:27 (28)

Three Mosaic texts undergird many of the legal assumptions and actions regarding blasphemy in early Judaism. In chapters 5-7, we will analyze this triumvirate of Mosaic texts—Exod 22:27 (28), Lev 24:10-23, and Num 15:30-31—beginning with Exod 22:27 (28):

θεοὺς οὐ κακολογήσεις[504] καὶ ἄρχοντας τοῦ λαοῦ σου οὐ κακῶς ἐρεῖς (LXX).	Do not blaspheme God or curse the ruler of your people (NIV).	אלהים לא תקלל ונשיא בעמך לא תאר׃ (MT)

When it comes to the issue of blasphemy, Hebrew scripture,[505] Christian scripture,[506] Philo,[507] Josephus,[508] and the Talmud[509] make reference to Exod 22:27.[510] It is little wonder, therefore, that modern interpreters have identified Exod 22:27 as a primary text or even a legal foundation for understanding the Jewish conception of blasphemy.[511] However, treating this verse as a cornerstone for blasphemy could be hasty. Not only are there difficult text-critical issues and questions of interpretation, but also some have even argued that Exod 22:27 has nothing to do with blasphemy.[512] We will set out the issues and address them in turn.

5.1 Is This Blasphemy?

Of first importance, we must address the claim that Exod 22:27 does not deal with blasphemy. Brichto has argued that blasphemy (= cursing God) is not the issue

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[504] Following A, ℵ, and A, whereas Sym has οὐκ ἀτιμάσεις, *do not dishonor*, and Aquila has οὐ καταράσῃ, *you shall not curse*; see Wevers (1991) 265 and Houtman (2000) 231.

[505] 2 Kgs 19:3; Isa 8:21.

[506] Acts 23:5; cf. Jn 18:23 (κακῶς ἐλάλησα).

[507] *Mos.* 2.205, *Spec.* 1.53, and *QE* 2.5.

[508] A.J. 4.207 and C.Ap. 2.237.

[509] *b. Sanh.* 66a.

[510] The versification varies. The Hebrew has v. 27 as does Rahlfs' LXX. In contrast, the English versions, the *Göttingen Septuaginta*, and Brenton (1851) trans. of LXX has v. 28.

[511] Bock (1998) 33, n. 6; Enns (2000) 452-3; Sarna (1991) 140; Cassuto (1967) 293.

[512] Brichto (1963) 150-65; Durham (1987) 329.

here.[513] Focusing on the Hebrew, Brichto argues that קלל in the piel stem (*to revile;* lit. *to make light*) does not necessarily involve speech and, in fact, usually does not.[514] Furthermore, ארר (*to curse*) should not be limited to meaning a spoken curse but, more fundamentally, it means, "to bind with a spell or put under a ban."[515] Thus, Brichto understands the first expression, אלהים לא תקלל (22:27a), to mean *do not show disrespect for Deity*, which he further interprets as, *do not disregard God's moral standards*.[516] In addition, Brichto believes that the second expression, לא תאר ונשיא בעמך (Exod 22:27b), should not be limited to *do not curse a leader of our people*, but should be taken figuratively as *do not do anything that brings civil authority into the disfavor of God.*[517]

On the whole, Brichto's analysis is persuasive. However, because he labors under the conviction that the term *blasphemy* only refers to *cursing God* (verbal imprecation or casting a curse or spell on someone), by definition he rules out blasphemy in verse 27.[518] This is a mistake. As we have argued in section 4.6, blasphemy in early Jewish and Christian literature can include the notion of malediction or imprecation, but it is much broader concept. The fact that Brichto's analysis focuses on Hebrew and ours focuses on Greek has no bearing, since any language can lexicalize the concept of blasphemy. Our analysis in section 4.6 indicated that the verbal expressions found in verse 27, κακολογέω (*to blaspheme*) and κακῶς λεγεῖν (*to curse*), are used to lexicalize the concept of blasphemy. Although we argued that the lexical senses of κακολογέω and κακῶς λεγεῖν are limited to verbal actions, the discourse concept or contextual use of the two terms in Exod 22:20-27 extends their meaning to embrace non-verbal connotations (see § 5.3 below).

As such, the disagreement between Brichto's analysis and our own is largely terminological. We both agree that Exod 22:27 refers to non-verbal (moral) behavior

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[513] Brichto (1963) 118-79 is followed by Durham (1987), Sprinkle (1994) 167-8, and Enns (2000) 445, 452-3; in contrast, see Noth (1962) 187; Cassuto (1967) 193-4; Hyatt (1971) 244.
[514] Brichto (1963) 151.
[515] Brichto (1963) 114-5.
[516] Brichto (1963) 158.
[517] Brichto (1963) 158.
[518] Brichto (1963) 177.

as much as it does to verbal behavior. We disagree on whether *blasphemy* is the correct term to describe the phenomenon in verse 27. Our analysis indicates that it is the correct term.

5.2 Who Is Blasphemed?

There is some question about who is being *blasphemed* in Exod 22:27a. The MT has the plural, אלהים, which probably explains why we find the plural θεοὺς in LXX.[519] Although the plural form is used, it is possible that אלהים or θεοὺς has singular intent.[520] Disagreement over whether to translate the terms as singular or plural, as well as disagreement over their meaning has resulted in four possible translations—*judge, judges, God,* or *gods*.

5.2.1 Judge(s)

A long-standing interpretation is that אלהים in verse 27a refers to *judges* or a *judge*. *Targums Pseudo-Jonathan* and *Neofiti* have דיינינון (*your judges*), *Targum Onqelos* has דיינא (*judge*), and *b. Sanh.* 66a has אלהים, which in context, clearly refers to *human judges*. Some modern interpreters also follow this view.[521] There are two reasons for translating θεοὺς or אלהים as *judges* or *judges*. On the one hand, interpreting it as *judges* eliminates an inconsistency that would otherwise appear if it were translated as *gods*. If it were translated as *gods*, Exod 22:27 would be saying do not disrespect the gods, and this seems inconsistent with the uncompromising anti-other-gods context of Exodus.[522] On the other hand, translating θεοὺς or אלהים as *judge* seems to make better sense than translating it as *God*. After all, God is the speaker or the voice behind Exod 22:27 and we would not expect God to speak of Himself in the third person.[523]

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[519] Wevers (1991) 265 cites later Greek miniscules that have the singular, θεὸν, which simply indicates that there was a tendency to interpret the plural as a reference to the God of Israel.

[520] In Exodus, אלהים often has the same referent as יהוה (e.g., 3:4, 16, 18; 4:5; 5:1; 6:2, 7; etc.) and, although אלהים is a *plural* noun, it is frequently the subject of 3rd person *singular* verbs (e.g., 1:20; 2:24, 25; 3:4, 6, 14; etc.).

[521] Jacob (1992) 708; although Houtman (2000) 231 rejects the view that אלהים = *judges*, he identifies Buber-Rosenzweig and Cazelles as holding it.

[522] E.g., "You shall have no other gods before me" (NRSV Exod 20:3) and "Do not invoke the names of other gods; do not let them be heard on your lips" (NRSV Exod 23:13).

[523] Sarna (1991) 140.

If we follow this long-standing tradition that θεοὺς or אלהים refers to not blaspheming *judges* in verse 27a, then it is more-or-less synonymous with verse 27b, which warns against cursing *rulers* (ἄρχοντας or נשׂיא). However, this is where the argument loses steam, according to Houtman.[524] The parallel between the first and the second half of the verse does not hold; whereas θεοὺς is not further defined, ἄρχοντας (*rulers*) is further qualified by the phrase τοῦ λαοῦ σου (*of your people*). This weighs against equating θεοὺς and ἄρχοντας. As we shall see, there are other factors that count against this position too.

5.2.2 The one true God

Another interpretation, which is widely held by modern scholars, understands אלהים as a collective singular in 22:27a and thus a reference to the *one true God.*[525] This is not unreasonable, since the overwhelming use of אלהים in Exodus refers to *the one God of Israel* (e.g., 19:3; 20:2).[526] This strongly counts against the previous view that אלהים refers to *judges.* That אלהים in verse 27a refers to the one true God is reinforced by the context of the Book of the Covenant (Exod 20:22—23:33), which pertains to giving the law by "the LORD your God" (יהוה אלהיך; 20:2) and "the LORD" (יהוה; 20:22). Because God is the key figure and final authority throughout the discourse, when we encounter the warning not to undermine authority—"Do not blaspheme God (אלהים), or curse a leader of your people (נשׂיא)"—it would seem natural to take אלהים as a reference to God and נשׂיא as reference to administrative leaders. This preserves the balance between divine and human authority exhibited throughout the Book of the Covenant (see § 5.4), where God gives the ordinances (21:1), but human *judges* (פללים) interpret and apply them (21:22).[527] This balance

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[524] Houtman (2000) 232.

[525] Enns (2000) 452-3; Houtman (2000) 231; Sarna (1991) 140; Durham (1987) 329; Childs (1974) 479.

[526] The word אלהים occurs 139 times in Exodus: (a) 131 refer to the one God of Israel; (b) four refer to other gods (18:11; 20:3; 23:13; 32:23); (c) once it is predicated of Moses (7:1); and (d) three times (21:6; 22:7-8). It could refer to *judges*, which is preferred by Enns (2000) 444, or to *God*, which is preferred by Durham (1987) 321.

[527] With casuistic formulations, like we find in "the Book of the Covenant," a criminal or civil suit is presented, a human authority under divine revelation makes a legal decision, and a general principle is formulated in casuistic terms (e.g., Lev 24:10-23). Although the decision comes through a human court, it has the authority and sanction of divine command. See Sarna (1996) 161. Cf. Sprinkle (1994) 167, who also notes the divine-human authority pattern.

can also be seen in other texts that differentiate between divine and human authority and warn against disparaging either one.[528]

5.2.3 Other gods

When we turn to LXX, however, some difficulties arise. Of the 23 occurrences of θεοὺς used in Exodus, 22 occurrences refer to gods other than the one true God and the 23rd is the debated text of Exod 22:27a. It suggests, of course, that the author(s) of LXX Exodus did not intend θεοὺς to refer to the one God of Israel. In fact, both Josephus and Philo, who were influenced by LXX, interpret θεοὺς in 22:27a as a reference to *other gods*. Both Philo[529] and Josephus[530] argue that it is important not to blaspheme the so-called gods of other nations, because the name "god," in general, is worthy of the highest honor and respect. Their motivation was apologetic, advocating Jewish monotheism to a readership that was influenced by a broadly Greco-Roman understanding of divine realities. As we will see in chapter eleven, Philo adds insight to our understanding of blasphemy, but his interpretation is not the only Jewish understanding available during the first century and it does not particularly fit the Johannine context. For our purposes, we need to look elsewhere for a more satisfying and relevant understanding of verse 27a.

5.2.4 Intermediary figures

Another possibility is that θεοὺς in verse 27a refers to intermediary figures, whether human or superhuman. Already in Exod 7:1, Moses is given the title of *god*[531] and now, in the immediate context of 22:27, another intermediary figure is introduced by the Lord:

> I am going to send *an angel* in front of you, to guard you on the way and to bring you to the place that I have prepared. Be attentive to him and listen to his voice; do not rebel against him, for he will not pardon your transgression; for *my name is in him* (NRSV; Exod 23:20-21, my emphasis).

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[528] 1 Kgs 21:10; Isa 8:21; Prov 24:21; Philo *Alleg. Interp.* 2.78, *Fug.* 84; Josephus *A.J.* 8.358-9; Acts 6:11; cf. 1 Pet 2:17.

[529] Philo *Mos.* 2.205-206; cf. *Q.E.* 2.5; *Spec.* 1.53.

[530] Josephus *C. Ap.* 2.237; cf. *Ant.* 4.207.

[531] Cf. Exod 4:16 and Philo, who writes that Moses "was named god and king of the whole nation" (*Mos.* 1.158). On the exalted Moses traditions, see Hurtado (1988) 56-9 and Meeks (1968) 354-71.

There are two Jewish traditions that allude to Exod 23:20-21 and both may shed light on who is blasphemed in Exod 22:27a. The first comes from the *Apocalypse of Abraham*, which can be dated between 70 and 150 C.E.[532] In this text, God commands an angel named Yahoel to consecrate Abraham (*Apoc. Ab.* 10:3-4). The angel, whose name is thought to be a combination of *Yahweh* and *El*, is indwelt by God's *ineffable name* (*Apoc. Ab.* 10:8) and is given powers of divine administration (*Apoc. Ab.* 10:8-14). In this way, the *Apocalypse of Abraham* seems to allude to Exod. 23:20-21, where God promises to send an angel to lead Israel and warns the Israelites not to disobey the angel, *for my name is in him.*[533] The second tradition comes from Philo who, in his commentary on Exod 23:20-21,[534] describes the angel that leads Israel as the Logos. The Logos is the μεσίτης or *mediator* of God's gifts and benefactions, who is elsewhere given the title of *God.*[535] What is striking is that the identification of certain figures as *gods* is not exceptional in first-century Jewish literature.[536] This accords with Mach's findings that, within second Temple Judaism,

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[532] So Rubinkiewicz in *OTP* (1983) 683.

[533] So Hurtado (1988) 80. Cf. the allusion to Exod 23:20-21 in the later tradition of 3 Enoch, where Metatron/Enoch is called by "the name of the Creator" (4:1) and is known as "the lesser YHWH" because God states that "my name is in him" (12:5).

[534] Philo *Q.E.* 2.13; cf. *Agr.* 51 and *Migr.* 174.

[535] In commenting on Gen 31:13, Philo writes that "Here it gives the title of 'God' to His chief Word," καλεῖ δὲ θεὸν τὸν πρεσβύτατον αὐτοῦ νυνὶ λόγον (Loeb; *Somn.* 1.230). See also the reference to *the second God* in *Q.G.* 2.62, which has been attributed to Philo.

[536] For example, in the DSS, a figure named Melchizedek is identified as *a god* (אלהים) and, like the אלהים mentioned in Psa 82:1, takes his place in the divine council and holds judgment in the midst of the gods (cf. 11Q13.2.10, 24-25 [11QMelch 2.10, 24-25]). We repeatedly hear of heavenly beings or *gods* (אלים) in the War Scroll (e.g., 4Q491[a] [4QWar Scroll[a]] 8-10, I, 13; 4Q491[a] [4QWar Scroll[a]] 13, 1; 4Q491[a] [4QWar Scroll[a]] 15, 8) and in the Songs of Sabbath Sacrifice (4Q400 [4QSongs of the Sabbath Sacrifice] 1, I, 20). Charlesworth and Newsom (1999) 7 observe that many occurrences of אלהים in the *Sabbath Songs* "are ambiguous and could refer to God or to angels." The biblical background for the use of אלהים for divine or angelic beings is found is Ps 8:6; 82:1, 6; 97:8; 138:1. In addition, the DSS describe an individual who is given a mighty throne in the congregation of the gods, who claims to be counted among the *gods* (אלים) and has incomparable glory without equal (cf. 4Q491[c] [4QWar Scroll[c]] 1, 7-8 and 11 which, in older nomenclature, is 4Q491[a] [4QWar Scroll[a]] 11, I, 14-15 and 18; cf. Morton Smith [1992] 290-301, esp. 296 for his reconstructed translation.

Outside the DSS, there are exalted figures who, if not directly called *gods,* are described in god-like terms. For example, Enoch, like God, is placed on a throne of glory (1 Enoch 62:5; 69:29), identified as the majestic "son of man" (1 Enoch 71:14), and considered worthy of worship (1 Enoch 48:5). Or again, we have "one like the son of man" who rides on the clouds, exercises divine prerogatives, and yet is distinct from "the Ancient of Days" (Dan 7:9, 13-14). Similarly, in Ps 109:1 (Heb 110:1) two divine figures are presented, *God* and *my Lord* (see Segal [1994] 130-1), which is one the most often quoted scriptures in the NT (so Hengel [1995] 119-225, esp. 133, who notes that Ps. 110:1 is quoted or alluded to 21 times in the NT, though he failed to consider Jn 20:28 where Thomas addresses Jesus as, "My Lord and my God."). Texts like Daniel 7 also provided the basis for believing that there are *two powers in heaven* (see Segal 1977). We can observe this in certain tannaitic midrashim (70 -220 C.E.) that indicate that passages in Exodus have been understood to support the

different types of monotheism can be discerned.[537] One type, *inclusive monotheism*, vigorously affirms one God, but at the same time avows the existence of other exalted heavenly beings.[538]

Inclusive monotheism, in our judgment, provides a plausible theological context for reading verse 27a during the first century. Just as Philo and Josephus read verse 27a as a reference to *other gods*, so it is possible that other first-century Jews understood it as a reference to other gods, *but in the more positive sense of divine mediator figures*. If so, then Johannine Jewish Christians and their non-believing Jewish counterparts could have read verse 27a as "Do not blaspheme divine mediators [of God]."

5.2.5 Preliminary conclusion

Although it is possible that all four interpretations could have surfaced during the first century, and we know at least one interpretation did (see Philo and Josephus), we believe that early Jewish readers would have found two readings most commendable. On the one hand, if LXX had been influential, which it was, and if we presuppose inclusive monotheism, which we should, then verse 27a could have been understood as a prohibition against slandering gods and/or divine intermediary figures. On the other hand, when we see that the overwhelming use of אלהים in Exodus refers to God, once we grant that translating אלהים into Greek would account for the plural use of θεοὺς, and after we consider the literary context of the Book of the Covenant,[539] then it is reasonable to suppose that the prohibition of verse 27a is concerned with blasphemy against God and not against intermediary figures.

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notion that there are two powers in heaven, something that the midrashim themselves dispute (see *Mek. R. Ishmael* on Exod 15:1ff and *Mek. R. Simeon ben Yohai* on Exod 15:1ff.; cf. Segal [1999] 75-80). See also Hayman (1992) 1-15 and Barker (1992) *passim*, both of who argue for a type of *cooperative dualism* between a High God and a secondary divine being.

[537] Mach (1999) 21-42 describes an *exclusive-polemical monotheism*, an *exclusive-assimilative monotheism*, and an *inclusive monotheism* (our terms), each reflecting different political-cultural situations.

[538] An example of *inclusive monotheism* is found in *Jub.* 15:31-32a: "Because (there are) many nations and many people, and they all belong to him, but over all of them he caused spirits to rule so that they might lead them astray from following him. But over Israel he did not cause any angel or spirit to rule, because he alone is their ruler and he will protect them"; cf. *OTP* (1985) 87.

[539] The context on the Book of the Covenant presents a balance between divine and human authority.

Henceforth, we will suppose that the referent is God, knowing that it was not the only way the text could have been understood.

5.3 The Literary Context

How does the literary context or discourse of Exodus shape the meaning of the prohibition in Exod 22:27? The broader context or discourse is often identified as *the Book of the Covenant* (Exod 20:22—23:33).[540] It is considered the oldest collection of laws in the OT and represents a sample of laws drawn from a larger body of judgments.[541] Whatever the origin, in their present form, the laws comprising the Book of the Covenant are too inexact, too concise, and not comprehensive enough to serve as a legal code for governing a society.[542] The inclusion of the Book of the Covenant in the narrative of Exodus must have had another purpose besides providing genuine legal guidance. A clue to its purpose comes from the two forms of law found in the Book of the Covenant, casuistic and apodictic.[543] The casuistic laws express conditions and corresponding penalties for civil and criminal cases.[544] They are secular laws dealing with cases of slavery, injury, property, and restitution. Casuistic case laws were resolved in two ways. Occasionally, litigants would come and take oaths before God to establish guilt or innocence (22:8, 9, 11; cf. 21:6). However, scholars think it is more likely that that layman would be selected to function as judges to form impromptu courts to decide matters of dispute (cf. 21:22).[545] This pattern is already pictured in Exod 18:13-26. In contrast, the apodictic laws are unconditional demands that deal more clearly with a person's relationship

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[540] Enns (2000) 439; Sarna (1996) 158; Sprinkle (1994) *passim*; Durham (1987) 305; Childs (1974) 451; Hyatt (1971) 217; Noth (1962) 169; cf. Exod 24:7.

[541] Based on comparisons with other law codes of the A.N.E., it is like that the code comes from the settlement and pre-monarchial periods of Israel's history. They were probably drawn from Canaanite, Mesopotamian, Egyptian, and Hittite reservoirs; see Hyatt (1971) 218, 222-4, Noth (1962) 174, Durham (1987) 317.

[542] Important details are missing (e.g., very little is said about marriage law) and other laws are too compact or obscure to provide more than minimal guidance.

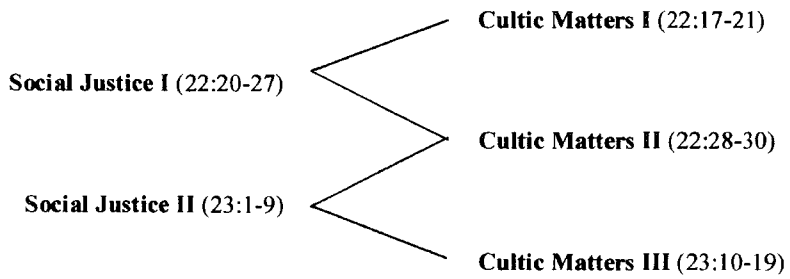
[543] For a discussion about these two forms of law, various critiques of them, and alternative classifications, see Noth (1962) 174-5, Hyatt (1971) 219-222, and Childs (1974) 452-3.

[544] Hyatt (1971) 219 identifies Exod 21:2-11; 21:18—22:17 as casuistic in form.

[545] So Noth (1962) 174-5; Hyatt (1971) 219-220 following Albrecht Alt. Noth (1962) 187-88 also believes that נשׂיא (22:27) refers to a representative of the twelve tribes who functioned as a judge or leader during the premonarchy period. During the first-century, Jews might have taken this as a reference to judges appointed over certain cities (cf. Josephus *A.J.* 4.214ff.).

with God, including issues of morality and cultic regulations.[546] In matters of apodictic law, no human court convenes; rather, judgment is the prerogative of God (cf. 22:23). It is noteworthy, therefore, that the apodictic and casuistic laws stand side by side in the Book of the Covenant[547] and both are said to have been given by Yahweh himself (cf. 20:22; 24:7). One might expect to find casuistic laws credited to human courts and judges, but that is not so. The final editor of Exodus makes it clear that Yahweh is the source of *law*, both civil and religious. In this way, *law* becomes part of Yahweh's continuing redemptive action on behalf of Israel.[548] Even if covenant law comes though the mediation of human judges, Yahweh himself, as the Book of the Covenant presents it, ultimately authorizes such law.[549] The point is this, rather than diminish human mediators of law, this elevates them to a status comparable to the Lawgiver.[550] This is what we see in our target text of Exod 22:27—*respect for God* goes hand-in-hand with *respect for the leaders of his people*.[551] Viewed from this perspective, Exod 22:27 expresses *the foundational law of laws* in that obedience to it would be a necessary precondition for obeying all of the other covenantal laws.

When we turn to the narrower context, we find Exod 22:27 is part of a series of paragraphs that alternate between issues of social justice and cultic matters.[552]



[546] Hyatt (1971) 219 identifies Exod 21:12-17; 22:18—23:19 as apodictic in form.

[547] So Noth (1962) 175.

[548] "Like the Ten Commandments, the Book of the Covenant has to be seen in its redemptive context, as a gift of God to a people already redeemed." Enns (2000) 439.

[549] Hyatt (1971) 219.

[550] Sprinkle (1994) 167.

[551] Broadly speaking, this is one way to articulate the thrust of Exod 22:27. We will describe the meaning in greater detail below. Textually, B and ℵ have ἄρχοντας; in contrast, A, Sym, and Theod have the singular, ἄρχοντα; see Wevers (1990) 355. Heb. Exod 22:27b has נָשִׂיא, which Speiser (1963) 111-17 describes as an elected leader of the people (not a king), who was thought to be chosen by Yahweh.

[552] The diagram is a modification of a chart by Sprinkle (1994) 160.

Sprinkle observes that "by such an organization the author indicates, whether consciously or unconsciously, that there is no dichotomy between the secular and sacred, between 'church' and 'state', between justice and religion in Israel, but that these are inextricably intertwined."[553] This observation reinforces the point made previously regarding the correspondence between the sacred and the secular, the divine and the human, a correspondence that is recapitulated by the two-fold prohibition expressed in Exod 22:27.

Narrowing our focus still further to our target paragraph of 22:20-27, we see three cases concerning the mistreatment of disadvantaged individuals, which is concluded by what Sprinkle calls a *generalizing summary* in verse 27.[554] In the first case (v. 20), we find a warning not to *mistreat* (κακόω) the sojourner[555] because the Israelites themselves were sojourners in the land of Egypt. In the second case (vv. 21-23), we come across a warning not to *mistreat* (κακόω) widows and orphans. If any Israelite does so, God will hear their cry and kill the offender with the sword. On the one hand, God is the one who kills with the sword. On the other hand, the text suggests that the execution itself will be at the hands of the civil authorities. The word for *sword* can refer to a short dagger, which symbolizes the power granted to civil authorities for punishing wrongdoers.[556] In the third case (vv. 25-26), we find a warning not to *press down* (κατεπείγω) the poor who could be further disadvantaged by surety practices. Finally, the paragraph concludes with our target text of Exod 22:27—*do not blaspheme God or curse a leader of your people*—which *punctuates* the three moral exhortations with a call to respect heavenly and earthy authority.

The interpretation of verse 27, in the ordinary act of reading, whether during the time of the Johannine community or otherwise, is influenced by what readers hear in the

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[553] Sprinkle (1994) 161.

[554] Sprinkle (1994) 166-72, who is followed by Enns (2000) 452.

[555] The term *sojourner* (προσήλυτος) becomes a technical term for a Gentile who has converted to Judaism but, in this context, it probably refers to a foreigner or sojourner who is without rights or property. See the article and bibliography on προσήλυτος by H. Kuhli (1993) 3.170-71. The Hebrew has גר, which refers to a sojourner, a term that is also applied to Israel in Egypt (cf. 23:9).

[556] The term is μάχαιρα. Cf. Rom 13:4. However, the lexical evidence is mixed, since sword (μάχαιρα) can refer to different types of swords. See the article by Plümacher (1993) 2.397-8.

discourse leading up to that verse.[557] Reading through each of the three cases builds up semantic momentum that impacts verse 27. The sense of momentum is partially achieved through alliteration. There are five sequential prohibitions that begin with οὐ followed by a kapa-verb plus one conditional with a kapa-verb:

οὐ κακώσετε—*do not mistreat* (v. 20),
οὐ κακώσετε—*do not mistreat* (v. 21),
ἐάν ... κακώσητε—*if you mistreat* (v. 22),
οὐκ ἔσῃ ... κατεπείγων—*you shall not oppress* (v. 24),
οὐ κακολογήσεις—*you shall not blaspheme* (v. 27a), and
οὐ κακῶς ἐρεῖς—*you shall not curse* (v. 27b).[558]

The sense of momentum is also built up by the cumulative effect of the three moral exhortations, each of which focuses on the proper physical treatment of disadvantaged members of society.[559] The moral connotations of the three cases are, in effect, passed on to verse 27 with the result that οὐ κακολογήσεις (v. 27a) and οὐ κακῶς ἐρεῖς (v. 27b) take on broader and more figurative meanings. That is, it would be natural for a reader to conclude that disobedience of the laws of God is contempt for God and his leaders. If so, then the synonymous expressions, οὐ κακολογήσεις (v. 27a) and οὐ κακῶς ἐρεῖς (v. 27b),[560] not only refer to *bad mouthing* God and his leaders, but also, figuratively, to disobeying the law by *badly treating* disadvantaged individuals. We should note that the *lexical senses* of κακολογεῖν and κακῶς λεγεῖν are limited to verbal offenses[561] but, once placed within the Book of the Covenant, the terms acquire an expanded meaning so that the *discourse concept* of κακολογεῖν and κακῶς λεγεῖν comes to entail both verbal and non-verbal senses.[562]

To summarize, in the context of Exod 22:27, *blasphemy* is not only the *verbal abuse of God*, but also the *abuse of disadvantaged individuals*. Similarly, *cursing* civil

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[557] On how readers fill in *gaps of indeterminacy* during the reading process, see the theory by Iser (1978) and related secondary literature, such as Tate (1991) 151ff.

[558] Verse 28 has a sixth οὐ + kapa—"do not hold back (οὐ καθυστερήσεις) the first-fruits of your threshing floor and press." In some ways, verse 27 can be viewed as a link or hinge between the moral prohibitions of vv. 20-26 and cultic injunctions of vv. 28-30.

[559] The three cases, as Sprinkle 1994) 170-2 has argued, are moral rather than legal in nature.

[560] They can be treated as roughly synonymous expressions; see § 4.3.3.

[561] See § 4.3.3.

[562] Cassuto (1967) 293 comes to a similar conclusion when commenting on the Hebrew text: "This admonition includes *every utterance* or *act* that detracts from the Divine glory" (my emphasis).

authorities not only includes the *malediction* of such leaders, but also to the *maltreatment of the underprivileged.* In short, blasphemy is contempt for the God, his moral law, and his leaders.

5.4 Blaspheming God and His Leaders

Verse 27 links together the prohibitions against blaspheming God and the ruler in a type of *synonymous parallelism.* Traditionally, synonymous parallelism has been defined as the occurrence of two or more lines expressing the same sense in different but equivalent terms.[563] More recently, linguists have refined the analysis of parallelism in terms of grammatical, lexical, semantic, and phonological aspects.[564] In light of these refinements, we can see that verse 27 exhibits degrees of grammatical, semantic, and phonological synonymy.

A θεοὺς ..... οὐ κακολογήσεις
B ἄρχοντας τοῦ λαοῦ σου .... οὐ κακῶς ἐρεῖς

The syntax or grammar of line A corresponds to line B, even though line B has an expanded predicate. There is semantic equivalence between the prohibitions, οὐ κακολογήσεις (*you shall not blaspheme*) and οὐ κακῶς ἐρεῖς (*you shall not curse*).[565] Both of these expressions have a *paradigmatic sense relationship*[566] and, as such, we could translate verse 27 as, "You shall *not curse* God and you shall *not blaspheme* the leader of your people."[567] In addition, there is phonological equivalence between the sounds οὐ κακ .... εις in line A and in line B.

Synonymous parallelism does not require that all aspects are the same, only enough to draw readers into seeing the dissimilar terms together. In this case, we are invited to see both *God* and *the leaders of your people* synoptically. To blaspheme one is to

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[563] Influenced by Robert Lowth's 1753 work on Isaiah; see Berlin, *ABD* (1992) 5.156.

[564] Berlin, *ABD* (1993) 5.158-60.

[565] See § 3.6.3.3. For example, the expressions are interchangeable in traditions that warn against cursing of parents. Compare Exod 21:16, ὁ κακολογῶν πατέρα αὐτοῦ ἢ μητέρα αὐτοῦ τελευτήσει θανάτῳ, "Whoever curses father or mother shall be put to death" (NRSV) with Lev 20:9a, ὃς ἂν κακῶς εἴπῃ τὸν πατέρα αὐτοῦ ἢ τὴν μητέρα αὐτοῦ θανάτῳ θανατούσθω, All who curse father or mother shall be put to death (NRSV).

[566] On paradigmatic relationships, see § 4.2.

blaspheme the other. To have contempt for the law and judgments of the leaders of God's people is nothing short of contempt for God. In this way, the prohibition of Exod 22:27 against cursing rulers extends to the king (3 Kgs 20:10[568]) and the High Priest (Acts 23:4-5), since the authority of Israel's leaders was seen as stemming from God.[569] Certainly, the correspondence between heavenly and earthly authorities is attested to throughout Jewish and Christian scripture[570] and nowhere is this more clear than in Prov 24:21:

Φοβοῦ τὸν θεόν υἱέ καὶ βασιλέα καὶ μηθετέρῳ αὐτῶν ἀπειθήσῃς	My son, fear God and the king and do not disobey either of them.[571]

Because an indissoluble union between heavenly and earthly authorities was assumed in early Judaism, giving respect and honor to earthly authorities was an unquestioned duty and, conversely, disrespecting or undermining such authorities met with grave consequences. These assumptions are operative in the oft repeatedly injunctions to honor father and mother. To do otherwise, to curse or revile (κακῶς λογεῖν) one's parents met with severe punishment—death.[572] Similarly, Philo links divine and human authority, so that to blaspheme God is to be against Moses (*Alleg. Interp.* 2.78) and to dishonor one's parents is to dishonor the Master (*Decal.* 119). Likewise, Josephus contends that in matters regarding the observance of the law, disobedience of the priests of the Temple, particularly the High Priest, is the same as disobedience toward God (*C.Ap.* 2.194). Josephus also said that anyone who acts unjustly toward parents or impiously toward God, even if their acts were not accomplished, met with destruction (*C.Ap.* 2.217). Lastly, we should also note that Josephus implores judges in every city to demand respect and prohibit blasphemy in their presence, because not

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[567] Although Durham (1987) 329 argues that the piel of קלל (v. 27a) is not synonymous with ארר (v. 27b), which is a stronger term than קלל, we are satisfied that in LXX the terms κακολογεῖν (v. 27a) and κακῶς λογεῖν (v. 27b) are more-or-less synonymous.

[568] Heb. 1 Kgs 21:10.

[569] Childs (1974) 479.

[570] Several examples suffice: (a) 1 Kgs 10:1 links κύριος and ἄρχοντα [Heb. 1 Sam 10:1 has LORD and leader (יהוה and נגיד)]; (b) 1 Kgs 24:11 ties together κύριόν and χριστὸς κυρίου; (c) 3 Kgs 20:10 [Heb 1 Kgs 21:10] conjoins θεὸν and βασιλέα; (d) Isa 8:21-22 melds τόν οὐρανὸν ἄνω and τὴν γῆν κάτω [Heb. Isa 8:21 refers to cursing God and king (אלהים and מלך)]; (e) Acts 6:11 connects Μωϋσῆν and θεόν; (f) 1 Pet 2:17 associates θεόν and βασιλέα; and (g) Josephus, *A.J.* 8.358-359, states that Naboth was stoned because he blasphemed God and king

[571] Trans. by the author.

[572] E.g., LXX Exod 20:12; 21:15-16; Lev 20:9; Prov 20:9; Matt 15:4; Mk 7:10; Josephus *C.Ap.* 2.206.

to do so can lead to contempt for God (*A.J.* 4.215). It is not surprising, therefore, that Exod 22:27 links heavenly and earthly authority, nor is surprising that Bock concludes that verse 27 "reflects the view that to speak against God's rulers is to speak against the wisdom of the God who chose them."[573]

5.5 Conclusions and Prospects

With some confidence, then, we conclude that *first-century Jews would have understood Exod 22:27 as a warning not to blaspheme divine or human authority.*[574] The correspondence between heavenly and earthly authority, which is stressed throughout the Book of the Covenant, is reflected in the prohibition not to blaspheme. Since violation of that prohibition would undermine obedience to divine and human law, we have characterized it as *the foundational law of laws.* The prohibition against blaspheming God and leadership would have been viewed as central, not just to the Book of the Covenant, but also to Jewish society as a whole who saw itself under the reign of God and his authorized leaders. Furthermore, the synonymous parallelism in verse 27 indicates that God and his leaders must be seen synoptically, that *contempt for earthly authority alone would be tantamount to blasphemy of heaven itself.*

Looking ahead, the prospects for establishing that non-believing Jews would have considered the theology of FG as blasphemous depends partially on keeping in mind that *to curse* (κακῶς λεγεῖν) those authorized to lead the Jewish people was to blaspheme deity. In chapter 10 (§ 10.2), we will also find that Nicanor is accused of blasphemy because he had *spoken wickedly* (κακῶς λεγεῖν) against the sanctuary (1 Macc 7:42). In chapter 14, we will look at Jesus' statement to the High Priest—"If I have spoken wickedly (κακῶς ἐλάλησα), bear witness of the evil" (Jn 18:23a)—to see if blasphemy is an issue here in the *Jewish trial* scene. In chapter 15, we will also look at the so-called 'anti-Jewish' rhetoric of FG and ask whether the Johannine community, those who produced and propagated FG, could have been viewed as blasphemous for their apparent contempt of the Jewish leadership, the Ἰουδαῖοι.

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[573] Bock (1998) 35-6.

[574] For similar definitions, see Brichto (1963) 158 and Sprinkle (1994) 167. When we understanding blasphemy in this way, it becomes apparent that the death penalty is an unstated

CHAPTER 6
MOSAIC LAW ON BLASPHEMY
LEVITICUS 24:10-24

Lev 24:10-23 is the first reported case of blasphemy within Jewish scripture and, as such, it has provided an important precedent for discussions of blasphemy within subsequent Jewish literature.[575] In fact, Hartley characterizes Lev 24:10-23 as "the paradigmatic case for blasphemy."[576] The pericope begins with a narrative about an Egyptian-Hebrew man who cursed or blasphemed while quarrelling with an Israelite. The man is brought to Moses who, in turn, seeks guidance from Yahweh. Instructions are issued to execute the man, which is followed by a series of seven laws that function as the legal basis for the execution. The narrative ends by noting that Israelites obeyed the instructions of Yahweh by stoning the Egyptian-Hebrew man. There are two main questions that we will attempt to address regarding Lev 24:10-23: What discourse concept of blasphemy emerges from the text? What is the penalty for this offense?

6.1 The Offense of Lev 24:11

Verse 11 states the basic offense of the Egyptian-Hebrew man:

Καὶ ἐπονομάσας υἱὸς τῆς γυναικὸς τῆς Ισραηλίτιδος τὸ ὄνομα κατηράσατο. (LXX)	The Israelite woman's son blasphemed the Name in a curse. (NRSV)	ויקב בן האשה הישראלית את השם ויקלל (MT)

Although the basic offence is presented, it is unclear what precisely that offense entails. This is to be expected because Jews scrupulously avoided any hint of cursing God even when speaking about such incidents.[577] Euphemisms were used,[578] vague

consequence of verse 27. The consequence for mistreating or oppressing the underprivileged is death (vv. 23) and, as we have argued, that type of abuse counts as blasphemy.

[575] E.g., 1 Kgs 21:7; *m. Sanh.* 7.5; *b. Sanh.* 56a.

[576] Hartley (1992) 407. Other commentators also view Lev 24:10-23 as a central text regarding blasphemy, including Budd (1996) 334ff., Gerstenberger (1996) 360ff., B. Levine (1989) 166ff., and Wenham (1979) 310ff.

[577] S. Blank (1950) 83 states that "despite frequent allusions to the possibility of blasphemy, the words of a curse directed against God are never cited."

descriptions were employed, and harsh language was toned down.[579] Lev 24:11 seems to reflect this attitude since there are both grammatical and semantic ambiguities, both in LXX and MT, that make interpretation somewhat uncertain and disputed.[580]

In LXX, the meaning of the verbs καταράομαι (*to curse* or *to utter imprecations*) and ἐπονομάζω (*to pronounce* [*a name*]) is generally agreed on,[581] but the grammar has provoked debate, which has resulted in two ways of reading the verse. (a) The first way views the two verbs as referring to two distinct actions. In this case, the participle, ἐπονομάσας (*after naming*) is viewed as a temporal participle indicating an action prior to that of the main verb, κατηράσατο (*he cursed*). The verse could then be translated as *after naming the Name, he cursed.*[582] Brenton's translation of LXX reflects this option.[583] (b) A second way takes the participle, ἐπονομάσας (*pronouncing*), adverbially, in which case it modifies the action of the main verb, κατηράσατο (*he cursed*). The result is one blended action. Read adverbially, there are again two options: (i) Ἐπονομάσας (*pronouncing*) could be taken as a temporal participle indicating simultaneous action with the main verb and thereby translated, *while naming the Name, he cursed.*[584] (ii) Ἐπονομάσας (*pronouncing*) could be taken as an instrumental participle and thereby translated, *he cursed by means of naming the Name*, indicating *how* the curse was carried out.[585] This latter option is exemplified by the NEB: the man "uttered the Holy Name in blasphemy." To summarize, Lev 24:11 in LXX can be interpreted in two basic ways either (a)

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[578] Cf. Job 1:5, 11; 2:5, 9; and 1 Kgs 21:13 substitute ברך (*bless*) for a term like ארר (*curse*).

[579] S. Blank (1950) 84; Hartley (1992) 408; Gerstenberger (1996) 362.

[580] Since we are concerned with the *final form* of Lev 24:10-23 and how first-century Jews would have read that text, we cannot appeal to redaction to explain aporia, redundancies, and other difficulties. Cf. the work of Gabel and Wheeler (1980) 227-29 regarding the redactor's hand in Lev. 24:10-23.

[581] Wevers (1997) 393, n. 17, notes that Sym uses ἐβλασφήμησεν instead of κατηράσατο; cf. Liddell and Scott (1889) regarding καταράομαι.

[582] Brooks and Winbery (1979) 146ff.; Wallace (1995) 624-5.

[583] Brenton (1851) 162 has "And the son of the Israelitish woman named THE NAME and cursed."

[584] Although an aorist temporal participle (like ἐπονομάσας) often indicates action that occurs prior to the main verb, it can also indicate contemporaneous action. A typical example of this is ἀποκριθεὶς εἶπεν, *answering he said* (cf. Mt 13:37; 26:23; Mk 11:14: etc). See Wallace (1995) 624-5 and Brooks and Winbery (1979) 146ff.

[585] Brooks and Winbery (1979) 149-50; Wallace (1995) 628-9 calls it an adverbial participle of *means*.

describing two separate offenses of *pronouncing the Name* and *cursing* or (b) describing one offense of *cursing while pronouncing the Name*.

When we turn to the MT, there are differences of opinion regarding both semantics and grammar. Debate over semantics occurs with the first verb because there is some question regarding the root of וַיִּקֹּב. Is the root נקב (*to bore through, to pierce*, or *to pronounce*) or is it קבב (*to curse* or *blaspheme*)? Following current opinion it is likely that the root of וַיִּקֹּב is the piel form of נקב for at least three reasons:[586] (a) it eliminates a redundancy—"he cursed ... the name and he cursed"—that would occur in verse 11 if the root was קבב, (b) it anticipates the two uses of נקב in verse 16, and (c) early versions, such as LXX and *Targum Onqelos*, understood the first verb in the Hebrew in the sense of *pronouncing* the name, not cursing it.[587] Furthermore, we also follow Hartley, Gabel, and Wheeler's judgment that נקב should be understood in the neutral sense of *vocalizing* something, and not as a euphemism for speaking disparagingly as Wheeler sustains.[588] Therefore, וַיִּקֹּב should not be translated *he blasphemed the Name* (as the NRSV, NIV, and AV), but *he vocalized the Name* (as the NEB).

Debate over semantics continues with the second verb, קלל, which can mean *to make small, to esteem lightly,* or *to revile* and, in certain contexts, *to curse* in the sense of *hurling imprecations* or *invoking evil upon someone*.[589] The question is, shall we

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[586] See Brichto (1963) 143ff; Hartley (1992) 404 and 409; Budd (1996) 336; B. Levine (1989) 166; A. Phillips (1970) 55; and Weingreen (1972) 118-23. Conversely, see NIV, NRSV, RSV, AV, and *BDB* (1979) 866, which lists וַיִּקֹּב in Lev 24:11 under קבב.

[587] LXX has ἐπονομάσας (*to pronounce*) in Lev 24:11, which is then reiterated once in 24:15, ὀνομάζων δὲ τὸ ὄνομα Κυρίου (*and he that names the name of the Lord*), and once in 24:16, ἐν τῷ ὀνομάσαι αὐτόν τὸ ὄνομα Κυρίου (*let him die for naming the name of the Lord*). The Targums also tend to interpret the first verb in Lev 24:11 as *pronouncing the Name*, but they could be avoiding the use of curse-language in relation to God. As Grossfeld (1988) 54-55, n. 5 explains, *Targum Onqelos*, "in an attempt to avoid using the term 'curse' (Aramaic *lyṭ*) in conjunction with God, renders *qll* by the *aphel* of *rgz* with the meaning of 'to provoke' and *nqb* by *pr'ṣ* 'to pronounce'." Hence, *Tg. Onq.* states that the man "pronounced the name in provocation." *Tg. Neof.* and *Tg. Ps.-J.* are less consistent in their translation of *qll* by the *aphel* of *rgz*. McNamara (1994) 95-96 translates *Tg. Neof.* on Lev 24:11 as the man "expressed the holy Name with blasphemies and reviled (it)" and Maher (1994) 197 translates *Tf. Ps.-J.* on Lev 24:11 as the man "pronounced and blasphemed [*pryš wḥryp*] the great and glorious Name that was pronounced explicitly."

[588] Hartley (1992) 408; Gabel and Wheeler (1980) 228f.; Weingreen (1972) 121.

[589] Stuart (1992) 1.1218-9; *BDB* 886.

understand קלל in the sense of *reviling* or *showing contempt* (so Brichto, Phillips, and Weingreen)[590] or in the sense of *cursing* or *imprecating* (so Gerstenberger, Stuart, and B. Levine)?[591] It is likely that we should understanding קלל as *showing contempt*.

According to Brichto's analysis, which we have drawn upon earlier (see § 5.1), קלל in the Hebrew Bible does not have the connotation of *cursing* or *imprecation*, but rather has a wide range of meanings, "ranging from verbal abuse to action or conduct of an injurious nature. The majority of the cases fall into the latter category, in which verbalization is totally absent or, at a minimum, extrinsic."[592] Furthermore, he argues that the precise sense of קלל is dependent on the context and the subjects and objects involved. When קלל is used with parents as the object, it means *to show disrespect* (e.g., Lev 20:9); with kings, *to disparage, repudiate,* or *renounce* (e.g., Judg 9:27-28); with deity, *to have contempt for the ethical standards that God expects of people* (e.g., Exod 22:27).[593] Brichto's analysis is persuasive, but with two qualifications. First, we reject Brichto's definition of blasphemy. He is adamant that קלל is never used in the Hebrew Bible with the sense of *cursing* or *imprecating* God,[594] which appears to be so. However, as we noted earlier, he labors under the view that *imprecation against the Deity = blasphemy* and so wrongly concludes that there is a "total absence of blasphemy in the Bible."[595] In contrast to Brichto, we have argued that the concept of blasphemy during the late Second Temple and Johannine was much broader in scope than simply *cursing*. Second, Brichto does not adequately deal with the fact that historically some Jews have understood Lev 24:11 as a reference to *cursing God.* Jews during the late Second Temple period translated קלל with καταράομαι (*curse*) in LXX Lev 24:11, 15[596] and the rabbinic Sages interpreted Lev 24:11 as a reference to "Blessing the Name with the Name," a euphemism for

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[590] Brichto (1963) 118f., A. Phillips (1970) 41, and Weingreen (1972) 118, though Weingreen recognizes that the Piel form of קלל "does often mean 'cursed' in the sense of invoking calamity upon someone as evidenced, for example, by its occurrence in 2 Kg. ii 24" (119).

[591] Gerstenberger (1996) 362; Stuart (1992) 1.1218; B. Levine (1989) 166.

[592] Brichto (1963) 172.

[593] Brichto (1963) 176-77.

[594] Brichto (1963) 143-65.

[595] Brichto (1963) 164, cf. 177.

[596] Brichto (1963) 177 acknowledges LXX but dismisses it as erroneous.

cursing.[597] So, while we recognize that some early Jews understood Lev 24:11 in the sense of cursing or imprecating God, Brichto's analysis persuasively shows that the use of קלל, on the basis of the Hebrew Bible alone, means *to show contempt*. But even if we translate קלל in Lev 24:11 as *showing contempt*, we also insist that within the context of Lev 24:10-23 the use of קלל must be classified as blasphemy by our measure of blasphemy—not in the sense of cursing, but in the sense of *conveying harsh antagonism* and/or *denigrating or dishonoring* someone (see our conclusions to chapter 4). Hence, it is not surprising to find that a contemporary of the Johannine community, Symmachus,[598] rendered ויקלל in Lev 24:11 as ἐβλασφήμησεν,[599] nor is surprising that Codex 58 used ἐλοιδώρησεν,[600] since both βλασφημέω and λοιδορέω formed part of the terminological base of our concept of blasphemy (see chapter 4).

In addition to the terminological equivocations in MT, there are two grammatical ambiguities to consider. First, there is ambiguity regarding the object of ויקב (*he showed contempt for*). Is it the Israelite man with whom the Egyptian-Hebrew was fighting?[601] Or is it the Name, that is, God himself? It is more likely that it is God himself, because (a) Lev 24:15, rather decisively, identifies God (or gods) as the object of קלל, (b) in verse 11 את השם (*the Name*) could function as the direct object of ויקלל (*and he showed contempt for*), and (c) אלהים (*God*) can be the direct object of קלל (*showed contempt*) as in Lev 24:15 and Exod 22:27.[602] This interpretation is congruent with Talmudic tradition, which clearly understands Yahweh as the offended party in Lev 24:11.[603] Second, there is ambiguity regarding the relationship of the two verbs, ויקלל ... ויקב (*he pronounced ... he showed contempt*). On the one hand, as we saw with the Greek, the two verbs could refer to *two distinct actions* (so

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[597] *b. Sanh.* 56a.

[598] Würthwein (1979) 53 dates Symmachus' version at 70 C.E.

[599] See Field, *Origenis Hexaplorum* (1875) 209; cf. Wevers (1986) 262 and Wevers (1997) 393, n. 17.

[600] Wevers (1986) 262.

[601] Brichto (1963) 146.

[602] A. Phillips (1970) 41 also notes Isa 8:21 and 1 Sam 3:11ff. "where, as in the LXX, אלהים ('god') must be read for להם ('for themselves') in verse 13, this being designated a *tiqqūn sopherīm*."

the RSV). On the other hand, the second verb, ויקלל (*he showed contempt*), could modify the first, ויקב (*he pronounced*), in which case the verse reports *one action* with *two verbal aspects.*[604] The verse can then be translated as B. Levine does: "he pronounced ... in blasphemy" or "he pronounced by cursing blasphemously,"[605] indicating *one blended action of contemptuously pronouncing the Name* (so the NRSV and the NEB).

Here, we can come to a preliminary decision regard the offense depicted in Lev 24:11. The grammar and semantics of both LXX and MT allow for four basic interpretations. The Egyptian-Hebrew:

(a) *pronounced* the Name and then *showed contempt* for God (MT),
(b) *pronounced* the Name and then *cursed* God (LXX),
(c) *showed contempt* for God while *pronouncing* the Name (MT), or
(d) *cursed* God while *pronouncing* the Name (LXX).

Since we are not seeking a normative interpretation, but what might have been commended to first century Jewish readers, we must admit that all four options are possible. Nevertheless, if our conjectures have been correct, option (d) should not be ruled out, but option (c) is more likely. Thus, to simplify and to risk overstatement, Lev 24:11 can be understood as one blended action in which the Egyptian-Hebrew *demonstrated contempt for God by unambiguously vocalizing the Name itself.* The emphasis lays on the second verb קלל[606] and *contempt* for God, thus making it a clear case of blasphemy. The first verb (נקב) indicates how the blasphemy or contempt was manifested—it was vocal. The nefarious act was blasphemy and,

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[603] *b. Sanh.* 56a preserves an understanding of the offense as not simply uttering the Name, but using the Name in a curse against Yahweh—"the Name must be *blessed* by the Name"; cf. Livingston (1986) 352-54.

[604] See Gesenius, Kautzsch, and Cowley (1910) 485 on circumstantial clauses with *wāw* constructions and Waltke and O'Connor (1990) 540 (32.3b) on *wāw* constructions serving in a hendiadys.

[605] B. Levine (1989) 166 is supported by Hartley (1992) 404, n. 11c, Budd (1996) 336, and Bock (1998) 36f.

[606] In addition to grammatical reasons already cited, the thrust of the passage focuses on קלל; after all, the Egyptian-Hebrew offender is twice identified as המקלל, *the one showing contempt* (Lev 24:14, 23), and not as ונקב, *the one pronouncing.*

because it entailed the maleficent vocalization of the Name, it can also be viewed as a violation of the third commandment as well.[607]

6.2 *Kārēt* and the Blasphemer

In the Levitical account, the people take the Egyptian-Hebrew to Moses for judgment but, as the narrative implies, the likes of such an affront had yet to be witnessed among the people of Israel and so Moses was dumbfounded. Therefore, Yahweh's guidance was directly sought in the matter, whereupon three instructions immediately issue forth: (a) take *the blasphemer* (τὸν καταρασάμενον or המקלל) outside the camp, (b) lay hands on his head, and (c) stone him to death.

In LXX, the offender is taken outside the camp and for stoning by the whole *synagogue of Israel*, ἡ συναγωγὴ Ἰσραὴλ (v. 14, 16). The notion of taking an offender outside the camp[608] *for execution* can be understood in connection with *kārēt* or being *cut off* from the synagogue community.[609] The penalty of *kārēt* or extirpation was stipulated for grave offenses against God,[610] including blasphemy

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[607] *Contra* A. Phillips (1970) 55, who argues that Lev 24:10ff. primarily concerns a breach of the third commandment (Exod 20:7).

[608] Why the blasphemer was led outside the camp—ἐξάγαγε ... ἔξω τῆς παρεμβολῆς (v. 14)—probably concerns scruples about matters of purity. Outside the camp was reserved for the unclean (Lev 13:45-46; 14:3, 41, 45, 53). Indeed, B. Levine (1989) 167 argues that *taking the blasphemer outside* was partly due "to the impurity attached to a corpse" and Hartley (1992) 409 states that "the execution was to be done outside the camp in order to avoid defiling the camp by taking a human life." This is probably right as far as it goes. However, it is also possible that the offense of blasphemy itself (not just the dead corpse) was thought either to defile the larger group, which rendered the group unacceptable to God or implicated the larger group as accomplices to the crime, which made the group objects of divine wrath. Either way, the safety of the larger group was threatened (cf. Deut 19:19-20) and that required a mechanism to protect the community by discharging the impurity (so Snaith, 1967, 253) or the guilt (so Porter, [1976] 194 and Wenham [1979] 311). The instruction to lay hands on the Egyptian-Hebrew blasphemer might be viewed as a mechanism whereby any remaining impurity or guilt was transferred to the offender, who was then ritually expelled and promptly executed. See Budd (1996) 47f. for comments on transference theory, particularly regarding the scapegoat (cf. Lev 16:21 and Num 27:23).

[609] See the article on *kārēt* by Hasel (1995) 339-352 and the excursus by Milgrom (1991) 457-60, B. Levine (1989) 241-2, and Wenham (1979) 285-6. The repeated formula of הנפש ההוא מעמיה ונכרתה (*that person shall be cut off from his people*) is widely found in priestly writings (e.g., Gen 17:14; Exod 12:15, 19; etc.).

[610] cf. *m. Keritot* 1.1 names blasphemy as one of 39 offenses for which extirpation is the penalty; Milgrom (1991) 457 emphasis that *karēt* pertains to offenses against God, but not against humans, cannot be sustained. As Hasel (1995) 348 demonstrates, the penalty of *kārēt* is imposed on a wide range of offenses "against religion, morality, or sacral law."

(Num 15:30-31; 1 Sam 3:13 [cf. 2:31-33][611]), idolatry (Lev 20:2-5; cf. Lev 18:21, 29), violating the Sabbath (Exod 31:14-15), failing to circumcise (Gen 17:14), consulting the dead (Lev 20:6), engaging in prohibited sexual relationships (18:6-20, 22-23; cf. 18:29), eating with defiled hands (Lev 7:19-21), eating the fat or blood of animals (Lev 7:19-27; 17:14), and offering sacrifices inappropriately (Lev 17:3-9). Although most texts that mention the penalty of *kārēt* do not indicate how that takes place, it can be generally assumed that offenders will be cut off *directly* by God,[612] resulting in premature death (1 Sam 2:31-32), death of descendants (1 Sam 2:33; Ps 109:13), childlessness (Lev 20:18, 20-21), loss of kingly office or status (1 Kgs 2:45), banishment from the land (Lev 18:24-29), or the elimination of a whole people (Judg 21:6).

It is debated, however, whether banishment and execution by human courts can also be considered forms of *kārēt*; Milgrom thinks not, whereas B. Levine thinks otherwise.

Milgrom argues for a sharp distinction between *kārēt*, which is accomplished by God alone, and death by stoning, which is carried out by a human court.[613] Based on an analysis of nineteen cases of *kārēt* in the Torah, a few other biblical texts,[614] and two Hittite texts,[615] Milgrom concludes that *kārēt* could refer to either the extermination of one's descendants in this world or the denial of life in the world to come. In this view, it is possible for a human court to execute an offender and then, in a very distinct second action, for God to also extirpate the offender's line or deny him afterlife. The human and divine actions are sharply differentiated. Milgrom cites Lev 20:2-5 as just such an example where the Molech worshiper is to be executed by a human court and then extirpated by God. Unfortunately, nothing seems to necessitate Milgrom's interpretation of Lev 20:2-5; indeed, the act of execution (Lev 20:2) could be interpreted as the mode of extirpation (Lev 20:3), which draws together the divine and human actions. Similarly, the *execution* of the Sabbath violator in Num 15:32-36 appears to be presented as an example of what it means to be *cut off* in Num 15:30-31. So, contrary to Milgrom's argument, extirpation by God and execution by human hands do not always appear to be sharply distinguished (cf. also 2 Sam 3:31-34).

In contrast to Milgrom, B. Levine argues that there is a curious cooperation between divine and human agents in the enforcement of *kārēt*.[616] Levine notes that this cooperation comes to the fore in the warning against desecrating the Sabbath in Exod 31:14-15. On the one hand, the one who violates the Sabbath *shall be executed* (Exod 31:14b and 15b) and, on the other, such an offender *shall be cut off* from among the people (Exod 31:15a).[617] The explanation is that if the community fails to execute the offender, God would not fail to do

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[611] MT 1 Sam 3:13 uses מקללים (*the ones blaspheming*) and 3 Kgdms 3:13 (1 Sam 3:13) has κακολογοῦντες θεὸν (*the ones blaspheming God*).

[612] So Budd (1996) 122; e.g., Lev 17:10 which reports YHWH stating, "I will set my face against that person who eats blood, and will cut that person off from the people" (NRSV).

[613] Milgrom (1991) 457-60.

[614] Ps 109:13; Ruth 4:10; and Mal 2:3.

[615] Milgrom cites *ANET*[3] 208 (lines 35-38) and 209 (lines 600-18).

[616] B. Levine (1989) 242; *contra* Milgrom (1991) 460.

[617] Horbury (1998) 60 also argues that post-exilic Jews saw cooperation between divine and human agents in the execution of *kārēt*.

> so.[618] Hasel concurs that *the cutting off formula* "expresses the fact that the ultimate punishment is in God's hands; only in certain cases has God designated human agents to carry it out (Lev. 20:2; cf. Ex. 31:14)."[619] Furthermore, Levine also argues for a connection between *ostracism* and *being cut off* in that "banishment would often have resulted in death,"[620] though Levine's argument is less convincing on this point. Nevertheless, we can agree with Levine who argues, "In priestly law, the certainty of God's punitive wrath was institutionalized in the penalty of *kārēt*."[621]

The instruction to take the blasphemer outside the camp *for execution* is of special concern to us because it may shed light on the reference in FG to *expelling* Jewish Christians from the synagogue.[622] We must ask whether *expulsion* was ever substituted for *execution* or *kārēt*. Horbury's 1985 study, "Extirpation and Excommunication," answers affirmatively.[623] After the exile, there is evidence that grave offenders of the covenant were *expelled* from the community and *not executed.*

> Horbury admits a paucity of evidence, yet he is able to cite more than a dozen supporting texts.[624] After the exile, exclusion from the community occurred on the basis of uncircumcision, uncleanness, and immorality (see Deut 23:1-8). The first biblical evidence of expulsion of non-compliant Jews is found in Ezra 10:8, but there are other biblical examples.[625] Josephus also speaks of apostate Jews who claimed to have been unjustly *expelled* (ἐκβεφλῆισθαι) from Jerusalem (*Ant.* 11.340, 346-7), which is the same verb (ἐκβάλλω) used for Jewish Christians expelled from the synagogue (Jn 9:34-35). Horbury argues that Josephus' account is an instance of *substituting expulsion* for the death sentence, since apostasy was viewed as an executable offense (*Ant.* 4.309-310; cf. 3 Macc 7:12).[626] Other accounts of substituting expulsion for execution are cited.[627] Thus, in pre-rabbinic Judaism, excommunication from the synagogue was associated with laws concerning who culd be admitted to the temple congregation and receive covenant benefits.[628]

Horbury draws two general conclusions: (a) there is evidence from post-exilic times to the rabbinic era for *excommunication* from the Jewish community, which is sometimes disputed,[629] and (b) excommunication was not *kārēt*—

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[618] B. Levine (1989) 242.

[619] Hasel (1995) 348.

[620] B. Levine (1989) 242.

[621] B. Levine (1989) 242.

[622] One would expect that if non-believing Jews viewed the Johannine Jews as blasphemous, we would find references to *executions* in FG and not just *expulsions* from the synagogue (Jn 9:22; 12:42; 16:2a). Although there is one reference to killing Christians in FG and it is linked to excommunication, the reference is vague (Jn 16:2b).

[623] Horbury (1998) 43-66.

[624] Horbury (1998) 49ff. cites, for example: Ezra 10:8; the Aramaic passage of Ezra 7:11-26; Neh 10:3; Isa. 56:3; Deut 24:20 (cf. Deut 23); 2 Chron 26:21; 1QS 7.1; CD 12.4-6; Philo *Spec.* 1.60; Josephus *Ant.* 11.340, 11.346f., *B.J.* 2.143f.; 3 Macc 2:33, 7:12-15; and Jn 9:22, 9:34,12:42, and 16:2.

[625] See footnote 624.

[626] Horbury (1998) 52, 55.

[627] Horbury (1998) 52-59; e.g., Philo *Spec.* 1.160; CD 12:4-6; 1 Cor 5:13.

[628] Horbury (1998) 46.

[629] Horbury (1998) 46-59 rebuts the claim that expulsions from the Jewish community could not have occurred prior to 70 C.E.

extirpation or divinely-inflicted death—but was a substitute for *kārēt* or preparation for *kārēt*.[630] When severe violations of the covenant occurred, "excommunication did sometimes take the place of the death-penalty."[631] If Horbury's argumentation is accepted, then the *excommunication* of the Johannine Jewish-Christians could be understood as a response to some sort of *executable offense*, such as blasphemy.

6.3 Blasphemy-Laws in Lev 24:15-16

When we return to the Levitical account, we observe that the command to execute the blasphemer (v. 14) is followed by a series of seven laws with accompanying principles and the *lex talionis* regulation (vv. 15-22) all of which function as a legal basis for the execution.[632] Our concern is with verses 15 and 16, which provide the first two laws regarding contempt for God and maleficent vocalization of the Name.

24:15b ...ὃς ἐὰν καταράσηται θεόν ἁμαρτίαν λήμψεται	24:15b ... Anyone who curses God shall bear the sin.	24:15b ...יכ יקלל אלהיו ונשא חטאו:
24:16 ὀνομάζων δὲ τὸ ὄνομα κυρίου θανάτῳ θανατούσθω λίθοις λιθοβολείτω αὐτὸν πᾶσα συναγωγὴ Ισραηλ ἐάν τε προσήλυτος ἐάν τε αὐτόχθων ἐν τῷ ὀνομάσαι αὐτὸν τὸ ὄνομα κυρίου τελευτάτω (LXX)	24:16 One who blasphemes the name of the LORD shall be put to death; the whole congregation shall stone the blasphemer. Aliens as well as citizens, when they blaspheme the Name, shall be put to death. (NRSV)	24:16 ... ונקב שם יהוה מות יומת רגום ירגמו בו כל העדה כגר כאזרח בנקבו שם יומת: (MT)

Based on our analysis in section 6.1, it is worth pointing out that most English translations, like the one above, are misleading. On the one hand, the NRSV speaks of *cursing God* (v. 15b), which is acceptable from the point of view of LXX, since it uses καταράσηται (*cursed*), but is not acceptable from point of view of MT, which uses יקלל (*showed contempt*). On the other hand, the NRSV speaks of *blaspheming the name* (v. 16), which is clearly unacceptable, since LXX uses ὀνομάζων (*the one naming* or *pronouncing*) and MT uses ונקב (*the one pronouncing*). So, it is ironic, if

[630] Horbury (1998) 59-62 addresses whether extirpation (*kārēt*) was an early form of excommunication (so Morgenstern, Zimmerli, and A. Phillips) or whether extirpation, as the rabbis understood it, was premature death inflicted by God (so Tsevat and Weinfeld).

[631] Horbury (1998) 62.

[632] See the structural outline by Hartley (1992) 405-6.

not confusing, that we are arguing that the overall text concerns blasphemy, but that the English translation uses the term *blasphemy* wrongly.[633]

Nevertheless, three questions concern us here: (a) In verse 15b, who is the object of καταράσηται (*cursed*) or קלל (*showed contempt for*)? (b) What is the penalty for this offense? (c) Does verse 16 introduce a distinct offense and a distinct penalty from that already mentioned in verse 15?

First, there is a question about who is being offended, since MT has כי יקלל אלהיו (*if anyone shows contempt for his gods* or *his God*) and LXX has ὃς ἐάν καταράσηται θεόν (*if anyone curses God*). The plural form of אלהיו allows that the reference could be to "the deities of other nations or even evil spirits."[634] This interpretation, in fact, is argued by Philo, who writes, "clearly by 'god,' he is not here alluding to the Primal God ... but to the gods of the different cities who are falsely so called."[635] We will look at Philo's argument in further detail in chapter eleven but, for the moment, we note that other Jews of the late Second Temple era understood verse 15 as a reference to offending the one God of Israel—LXX Lev 24:15 has θέον!

Second, the penalty for *he who shows contempt* (יקלל) for God is stated as *then he must bear his own sin* (ונשׂא חטאו; LXX ἁμαρτίαν λήμψεται), which is similar to the phrase in Lev 5:1, *then he must bear his punishment* (ונשׂא עונו; LXX λήμψεται τὴν ἁμαρτίαν).[636] Milgrom argues that this "implies that the punishment will be meted out by God, not by man."[637] Milgrom's comment, no doubt correct, is contrary to our expectation, since verse 14 had already established that *the one showing contempt* (המקלל) was to be stoned by the hands of the congregation. We can conjecture that emphasis on divine punishment in verse 15 may be due to the nature

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[633] NRSV should have used the term *blasphemes* in v. 11 where it uses the term *curses*.

[634] Hartley (1992) 410 cities this as a possibility.

[635] Philo *Mos.* 2.205.

[636] The connection is noted by Budd (1996) 338 and B. Levine (1989) 167.

[637] Cf. Milgrom (1991) 295 on Lev. 5:1, who also cites *m. Sanh.* 4:5; *t. Šebu.* 3:1, 4; Philo, *Laws* 2.26.

of קלל itself, which can be public and observable or private and clandestine.[638] If an offense of קלל is private and clandestine, then it can only be known by God and thereby only punished by God through the penalty of *kārēt* (see § 6.2). However, in the case of the Egyptian-Hebrew, the offense was demonstrably public and, unless punished immediately by a human court, it might have undermined the community. Thus punishment was placed in the hands of men and the man was executed (Lev 24:23).

Third, the relationship between verse 15 and 16 is debated. On the one hand, it can be understood within the overall thrust of the passage, which concerns one crime (v. 11), one criminal (v. 14, 23), and one punishment (v. 14, 23). Read in this way, verses 15 and 16 explain in casuistic terms, and with a degree of literary flair, two different aspects of one and the same offense.[639] This is a coherent reading and certainly possible,[640] as *Targum Neofiti* on Lev 24:15-16 seems to support:

> 15b ... *Any man who pronounces the name of* God *in blasphemy* [שמה דאלה בגדפין] will receive (the punishment of) his sins.
> 16a And whoever *pronounces* the name of the Lord *in blasphemy* [שמיה דיי בגדפין] *shall surely be put to death*; all *the people of* the congregation will stone him.[641]

What is noteworthy is <u>how</u> *Targum Neofiti* paraphrases the Hebrew of Lev 24:15-16. In the Hebrew, *blasphemy* (קלל) is mentioned in verse 15, but not verse 16; conversely, *pronouncing* (נקב) the *name* (שם) is mentioned in verse 16, but not verse 15. Strikingly, *Targum Neofiti* conflates the language so that the terms for *blaspheming*, *pronouncing*, and *name* are found in both verse 15 and verse 16. Redistributing the terms in this way *Neofiti* draws the verses into closer parallel construction, which suggests that verse 16 addresses the same offense and the same penalty as verse 15, but with a slightly different poetic emphasis and elaboration. If so, *Targum Neofiti* understood Lev 24:15-16 as a reference to one offense and one

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[638] Suggested by the analysis of Brichto (1963) 151, 158, who argues that the sense of קלל need not entail a verbal aspect (and therefore a publicly observable aspect), but primarily involves a repudiation of God and his moral standards, which we have consistently translated as *contempt*.

[639] Bock (1998) 36ff.

[640] Again, we are concerned with the final form of the document and its plausible interpretation during the first century. For speculation about the origin of the passage, conflation of different sources, and original life settings, see Gerstenberger (1996) 364ff. and Gabel and Wheeler (1980) 227-29.

[641] McNamara (1994) 97; his italics.

punishment, not two, and the capital offense was not pronouncing the Name, as Heb Lev 24:16 might lead one to believe, but *pronouncing the name in blasphemy* or, if we may paraphrase, *vocalizing blasphemy against God by unequivocally saying his Name.*

On the other hand, there is evidence that early Jews understood Lev 24:15-16 as a reference to two offenses, each with distinct punishments.[642] First, as we mentioned, Philo interprets Lev 24:15 as a reference to cursing "the gods ...falsely so called" (*Mos.* 2.205). Philo surmises that the warning in Lev 24:15 is to prevent people from becoming disrespectful of the name *god* in general, but such disrespect is not an executable offense. In contrast, Philo interprets Lev 24:16 as a prohibition against uttering the Name *unseasonably* (ἀκαίρως), which is worse than cursing the gods and deserves the death penalty (*Mos.* 2.206). Philo also makes it clear that Lev 24:15-16 does not concern the blasphemy aimed directly against God himself, the thought of which is so shocking to Philo's sensibilities that he refuses to discuss it, obviously a crime worse than uttering the Name unseasonably (*Mos.* 2.206). Second, *Targum Pseudo-Jonathan* also understood Lev 24:15-16 as a reference to two offenses, each with its own penalty:

> 15b ... any *young* man or any *old* man who reviles *and blasphemes a substitute name of* his God [וחרף שום כינוי אלהיה] shall incur his guilt.
> 16a *but any one who pronounces and blasphemes* the name of the Lord [ומחרף שמא דה דמפרש] shall be put to death; the whole congregation shall pelt him with stones.[643]

With *Targum Pseudo-Jonathan,* in contrast to *Neofiti,* there is a sharper distinction between the two verses. The term *pronounces* is now only in verse 16 and the objects of blasphemy are more sharply distinguished—*a substitute name of his God* versus *the name of the Lord.* Hence, we are presented with two types of blasphemy. One type of blasphemy involves the explicit pronunciation of the Name and it is met with the death penalty. The other type of blasphemy involves the use of substitutes for the Name and it is not an executable offense. In making this distinction, *Targum Pseudo-Jonathan* agrees with the implicit assumption of *m. Sanh.* 7:5 and *m. Šebu.* 4:13 that

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[642] Hartley (1992) 410.
[643] Maher (1994) 198; his italics.

there is more than one kind of blasphemy.[644] Furthermore, it agrees with the Sages that only blasphemers who vocalize the Name should be executed, which is in contrast to R. Meir (140-165 C.E.) who held that one was liable even if a substitute was used for the Name.[645] Third, *Targum Onqelos* provides a close paraphrase of Lev 24:15-16 and seems to maintain a distinction between two distinct offenses, each with its own penalty—*provocation of God* results in bearing guilt and *pronouncing the Name of the Lord* leads to execution.

6.4 *Lex Talionis* and Blasphemy

As we have mentioned at the outset, Lev 24:10-23 provides a narrative framework for laws pertaining to blasphemy (vv. 15-16) and laws pertaining to the *lex talionis* (vv. 17-22).[646] What is interesting is that the redactor has placed specific laws pertaining to the eye-for-eye justice of the *lex talionis* immediately after the laws concerning blasphemy:

> 16b ... Aliens as well as citizen, when they *blaspheming the Name*, shall be put to death.
> 17 Anyone who *kills a human being* shall be put to death.
> 19 Anyone who *maims another* shall suffer the same injury in return:
> 20 fracture for fracture, eye for eye, tooth for tooth, *the injury inflicted* is the injury to be suffered.
> 21b ... but one who *kills a human being* shall be put to death. (NRSV; our italics)

It is significant that the literary structure suggests that *pronouncing the Name*, or *blaspheming the Name* (as the NRSV has it) is directly compared to *killing*, *maiming*, and *violently injuring* someone. However, of these violations, only murder and blasphemy carry the death sentence. The implication is clear, as Bock has observed, "to speak against God is the equivalent of verbal murder."[647]

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[644] *m. Sanh.* 7:4-5 assumes that only a blasphemer who vocalizes the Name is subject to execution, indicating that there is another type of blasphemer who does not vocalize the Name and is not to be stoned.

[645] *m. Šebu.* 4:13 states that R. Meir held that one was liable if he blasphemed God by any of the substitute names—אד (for *Adonai*), יה (for *Yawheh*), *Shaddai, Sabaoth, the Merciful and Gracious, Him that is Longsuffering and of Great Kindness,* or *an Attribute of God.* Also see *b. Sanh.* 55b-57a, 60a, and *b. Šebu.* 35a.

[646] Wenham (1979) 312 writes that the *lex talionis* law sets out "a fundamental principle of biblical and ancient Near Eastern law, namely, that the punishment must be proportionate to the offense."

[647] Bock (1998) 37.

6.5 Conclusions and Prospects

With the exception of Brichto, there is little dispute among contemporary scholars that Lev 24:10-23 concerns blasphemy. Indeed, the Levitical text not only shaped early Jewish perceptions about blasphemy, but also provided the foundation for legal opinions promulgated in the Mishnaic and Talmudic literature. Despite the agreement that blasphemy is an issue in Lev 24:10-23, there is uncertainty about what that entails. Uncertainty inheres in the fact that we are left guessing about what precisely Egyptian-Hebrew was supposed to have said; apparently, the redactors dared not repeat it for fear of perpetuating the offense themselves. Nevertheless, our analysis has uncovered two basic interpretations.

One interpretation of Lev 24:10-23 recognizes two types of blasphemy against God.[648] The first we can call *blasphemy*[1], which entails *showing of contempt for [or cursing; LXX] God* without the vocalization of the divine Name. This violation is punished by God directly, probably involving the penalty of *kārēt.* The second we can call *blasphemy*[2], which entails *vocalizing the divine Name in provocation.* The covenant community punishes this violation by stoning the offender to death.

Another interpretation recognizes only one type of blasphemy.[649] We can call this *blasphemy*[3], which entails *showing contempt for [or 'cursing'; LXX] God by vocalizing the Name.* In this interpretation, what was outrageous was not that the Name was vocalized *per se*—which was never a problem, done in the proper way, at the proper time[650]—but that disdain for God ascended to such hubris that the Egyptian-Hebrew dared to make his contempt unequivocal by calling out the Name itself. It was tantamount to verbal murder and therefore demanded execution in accord with the *lex talionis.*

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[648] Philo *Mos.* 2.203-206; *Tg. Ps.-J.* on Lev 24:10-23; *Tg. Onq.* on Lev 24:10-23; *m. Sanh* 7:5; *m. Šebu.* 4:13.

[649] This interpretation is sustained by the context, grammar, and semantics and in favored by some modern interpreters, such as Bock (1998) 36-37. This reading appears to be supported by *Tg. Neof.* on Lev 24:10-23.

[650] Cf. Gen 4:26, 12:8, 13:4; 1 Kgs 18:24; Ps 116:17; Joel 2:32 (3:5); and Zeph 3:9. However, rabbinic traditions are more restrictive, reserving the right to pronounce the Name for the High Priest in the Temple; cf *m. Yom.* 6.2 and *m. Soṭah.* 7.6.

The prospects for establishing that non-believing Jews would have considered the theology of FG as blasphemous are partly dependent on keeping in mind how Lev 24:10-23 portrays the Egyptian-Hebrew's act of blasphemy. That act emerged within the context of a quarrel whereby the man, in attempting to assert himself over his opponent presumed to use the divine Name to curse or repudiate God. It was an act of great presumption and unrestrained contempt for the sake of self-advantage. FG presents numerous quarrels between Jesus and his opponents where Jesus is accused of some form of self-promotion or self-exaltation and blasphemy (Jn 5:18ff; 8:31-58; 10:30-38). Based on the Johannine claims for Jesus, can a case be made that the Johannine community—those who produced, preserved, and propagated FG—could have been viewed as blasphemous, as even misusing the Name or a substitute,[651] in their exaltation of Jesus? Lastly, can the Johannine language of *putting the man outside of the synagogue* (ἀποσυνάγωγος γένηται; Jn 9:22; cf. 12:42; 16:2) and *throwing the man outside* (ἐξέβαλον αὐτὸν ἔξω; Jn 9:35) be understood in light of the Levitical command for *the whole synagogue to take the blasphemer outside for execution* (ἐξάγαγε τὸν καταράατο ἔξω ... πᾶσα ἡ συναγωγὴ ...λιθοβολήσουσιν; Lev 23:14; cf. 23:16, 23)?

[651] The Rabbis debated whether an inappropriate vocalization of a substitute for the tetragrammaton (such as biliteral Names, like El and Yh) constituted blasphemy (*m. Sch^{e}b* 4.13b; *b. Sch^{e}b* 35a; *b. Sanh* 55b-57a, 60a).

CHAPTER 7
MOSAIC LAW ON BLASPHEMY
NUMBERS 15:30-31

The triumvirate of Exod 22:27, Lev 24:10-23, and Num 15:30-31 has been rightly identified by Bock as the legal basis for discussions of blasphemy in Early Judaism.[652] It is surprising, therefore, that Bock also writes, "This text [Num 15:30-31] is not about blasphemy, but it is an important discussion of the death penalty, which allows it in later exposition to become related to blasphemy, since blasphemy also carries the death penalty."[653] Certainly, Bock is correct in arguing that Num 15:30-31 sheds light on the death penalty associated with blasphemy, but can we agree that the offense should not be classified as blasphemy? We will respond to this in the context of addressing two main questions: What is the discourse concept of the offense in Num 15:30-31, particularly as it emerges in the overall context of Numbers 11-16? And what is the penalty associated with it?

7.1 Sinning with a *High Hand*

15.30 καὶ ψυχή ἥτις ποιήσει ἐν χειρὶ ὑπερηφανίας ἀπὸ τῶν αὐτοχθόνων ἢ ἀπὸ τῶν προσηλύτων τὸν θεὸν οὗτος παροξύνει ἐξολεθρευθήσεται ἡ ψυχὴ ἐκείνη ἐκ τοῦ λαοῦ αὐτῆς	15:30 But whoever acts high-handedly, whether a native or an alien, affronts the LORD, and shall be cut off from among the people.	15:30 והנפש אשר תעשה ביד רמה מן האזרח ומן הגר את יחרף חרא מגדף ונכרתה הנפש ההוא מקרב עמה
15.31 ὅτι τὸ ῥῆμα κυρίου ἐφαύλισεν καὶ τὰς ἐντολὰς αὐτοῦ διεσκέδασεν ἐκτρίψει ἐκτριβήσεται ἡ ψυχὴ ἐκείνη ἡ ἁμαρτία αὐτῆς ἐν αὐτῇ. (LXX)	15:31 Because of having despised the word of the LORD and broken his commandment, such a person shall be utterly cut off and bear the guilt. (NRSV)	15:31 כי דבר יהוה בזה ואת מצותו הפר הכרת תכרת הנפש ההוא עונה בה: (MT)

Num 15:30-31 forms the climax and the main point for verses 21-31. This is indicated by the series of seven repeated phrases regarding the *unintentional* (שגגה/שגה) failure to keep the commandments,[654] leaving *sinning with a high hand*

[652] Bock (1998) 39 states, "With these three key texts from Exod 22, Lev 24, and Num 15 come the legal roots to the discussion on blasphemy."

[653] Bock (1998) 37.

[654] Num 15:22, 24, 25, 26, 27, 28, and 29; LXX uses ἀκουσίως.

(תעשׂה ביד רמה) in the eighth and climactic position.[655] The phrase occurs only here in the Hebrew Bible. Milgrom places the phrase within the broad ANE culture and concludes that "the original setting of this metaphor is seen in the statues of ancient Near Eastern deities who were sculpted with an uplifted or outstretched right hand, bearing a spear, war ax, or lightning bolt... The upraised hand is therefore poised to strike; it is a threatening gesture of the Deity against His enemies or a man against God Himself."[656] It is likely that this type of defiance is depicted in the story of Nicanor when "he stretched out his right hand toward the sanctuary" (2 Macc 14:33) and is referred to when God promises that the uplifted arm of the wicked will be broken (Job 38:15).[657] Still, on the basis of a close inspection of Num 15:30-31 and the rebellion narratives of Numbers, more can be said about *sinning with a high hand.*

First, the sin is against Yahweh—את יהוה הוא מגדף (*he affronts* or *blasphemes the LORD*) (Num 15:30b). As Ashley notes, the name *Yahweh* is in the emphatic position, indicating the emphasis is on the one offended.[658] Although the verb גדף (*affront* or *blaspheme*) in the Piel form is found only seven times in the Hebrew Bible, it occurs in key texts concerning defiance or blasphemy against God.[659] The term is also used in latter rabbinic literature for *blasphemy* as, for example, in the account of R. Simeon b. Laqisch (ca. 250), who repeatedly tears his clothes each time a certain Samaritan blasphemes God.[660] Moreover, as we noted earlier, Strack-Billerbeck state that in rabbinic literature the substantival participle, מגדף, could refer to blasphemers, idolaters, and people who curse the Name (see § 2.1).[661] However, the sharp distinction between these three types of מגדף is somewhat artificial, as Strack-

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[655] See the comments by Milgrom (1990) 125.

[656] Milgrom (1990) 125.

[657] The phrase describes Israel's defiance against Pharaoh and Egypt (cf. Exod 14:8 and Num 33:3).

[658] Ashley (1993) 289.

[659] The seven instances of are Num 15:30; 2 Kgs 19:6, 22; Isa 37:6, 23; Ezek 20:27; Ps 44:17. It is puzzling why Bock (1998) 32 and 37 recognizes, on the one hand, that גדף is a key Hebrew term for blasphemy and yet, on the other, denies that Num 15:30 concerns blasphemy and without comment. In contrast, Milgrom (1991) 458 identifies the offense of Num 15:30-31 as blasphemy and one of nineteen categories for which *kārēt* was imposed.

[660] *y. Sanh.* 7:25a, 65; cf. *m. Sanh.* 6:4, 7:4-5, 9:3; *m. Ker.* 1.1-2; *Sifra* on Lev 24:11-14 (*parashah* 14). See also the discussion by Bock (1998) 32 on the term גרף and 77-87 on the use of גדף in the midrashim.

[661] Bock (1998) 38 notes this three-fold typology, apparently borrowed from Strack-Billerbeck.

Billerbeck seem to recognize. Furthermore, it is significant to note that LXX Num 15:30 translates גדף with παροξύνω (*to despise*); this is significant because παροξύνω is only used in LXX Numbers to identify the type of sin for which the first generation of Israel died in the wilderness.[662]

> After the people of Israel called for a return to Egypt (14:4) and threatened to stone Moses and Aaron, Yahweh said, "How long will this people despise (παροξύνει) me? How long will they refuse to believe in me, in spite of all the signs that I have done among them?" (NRSV Num 14:11).
>
> Again, Yahweh states, "None of the people who have seen my glory and the signs that I did in Egypt and in the wilderness, and have not obeyed my voice, shall see the land that I swore to give to their ancestors; none of those who despised (παροξύναντές) me shall see it" (NRSV Num 14:22-23).
>
> Foretelling the doom of Korah and his mutineers, Yahweh states, "If ... the ground opens its mouth and swallows them up, with all that belongs to them, and they go down alive into Sheol, then you shall know that these men have despised (παρώξυναν) the LORD" (NRSV Num 16:30).
>
> Later, Yahweh announces, "Let Aaron be gathered to his people. For he shall not enter the land that I have given to the Israelites, because you rebelled (παρωξύνατέ) against my command at the waters of Meribah" (NRSV Num 20:24).

The point of citing the four passages above is show that *to affront the LORD* in Num 15:30b is terminologically and conceptually linked to the story of Israel's *rebellion against Yahweh* (Num 11-14, 16-20). It suggests that the rather *short phrase* regarding sinning with an *upraised hand* can be illuminated by the *extended story* of Israel's *uprising against God.* Although there are several instances of uprising in the wilderness, the narrative in Numbers makes it clear that each act of rebellion was done intentionally and in full knowledge of God's signs, wonders, and commands. Set within this account of Israel's defection, the phrase *to affront the LORD* (Num 15:30b) seems to take on the additional connotation of *blatant and defiant rebellion,* even *treason* and *betrayal.*

Second, the one who sins with a high hand is characterized as one who *disdains the word of the LORD* (דבר יהוה בזה) (Num 15:31a). The phrase, דבר יהוה, in the construct state, occurs only ten times in the Pentateuch and is used to sum up the Abrahamic Covenant (Gen 15:1, 4), the Sinai Covenant (e.g., Exod 24:3-4, Deut 5:5)

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[662] Where LXX uses παροξύνω, MT uses נאץ (Num 14:11, 23; 16:30), גדף (Num 15:30), and

and, very significantly, the Sinai-like revelation of Yahweh to Israel in the wilderness (Num 11:24). As such, דבר יהוה (*word of the LORD*) in Num 15:31 could be a reference to the broad covenantal decrees of God rather than to any particular law or regulation (e.g., Num 15:1-29). If this is correct, then the reference to *disdaining the word of the LORD* is tantamount to rejecting God's covenant or spurning Yahweh's offer of a relationship.[663] The rebellion of Israel in the wilderness is repeatedly characterized by LXX as transgressing τὸ ῥῆμα κυρίου (*the word of the Lord*),[664] the very phrase that LXX used to translate דבר יהוה in Num 15:31. This connection is enough to suggest that, for the translators of LXX, the rebellion of Israel in the wilderness was *sinning with a high hand.* Given these connections, it is a step into the available light to suggest that *to disdain the word of the LORD* (Num 15:31a) is *to spurn God's offer of a covenantal relationship* as Israel did in the wilderness.

Third, whoever sins with a high hand is further identified as one who *breaks his [Yawheh's] commandment* (מצותו הפר) (Num 15:31b). The LXX puts an interesting spin on the term פרר (*to break* or *violate*) by translating it with διασκεδάννύμι (*to scatter* or *to disperse*). In this way, LXX generates a harvest-metaphor such that the one who sins with a high hand not only rejects the word of God (Num 15:31a), but scatters it to the wind like so much worthless chaff (Num 15:31b). As a consequence, the offender or would-be thresher is himself emphatically *rubbed out* or *ground down* like worthless grain—ἐκτρίψει ἐκτριβήσεται ἡ ψυχὴ ἐκείνη (lit. *he [God] shall rub out the soul that shall be rubbed out*)[665]—thereby implicitly maintaining the equal and proportionate justice of *lex talionis* that we saw earlier with Lev 24:10-23.[666]

Next, we will consider the consequences of *sinning with a high hand* and the literary context in which this sin is profiled.

מרה (Num 20:24).

[663] Ashley (1993) 289 concurs.

[664] Cf. LXX Num 14:41, 31:16; Deut 1:26, 43; 9:23.

[665] The doubling of ἐκτρίβω in LXX Num 15:31 reflects the doubling of כרת in MT—הכרת הכרת הפר.

[666] The link between blasphemy and the *lex talionis* is explicit in Lev 24:10-23.

7.2 Being *Cut Off* (*Kārēt*)

As we have seen, the penalty for *sinning with a high hand* is being *utterly rubbed out* (LXX) or being *completely cut off* (MT). The warning against *sinning with a high hand* (Num 15:30-31) could be viewed as the climax and sharp contrast to the series of seven phrases regarding *unintentional sin* (Num 15:23-29). The crescendo effect is further emphasized by the two-fold repetition of כרת (*to cut off*):

> Whoever sins high-handedly ...
> affronts the LORD
> and *shall be cut off* (והכרתו) from among the people,
> having despised the word of the LORD
> and broken his commandment
> such a person *shall be utterly cut off* (הכרת תכרת) and bear the guilt.

Milgrom believes that the issue of *kārēt* or *being cut off* is a primary focus of the passage, identifying it as "the main innovation of this section."[667] We have already introduced the issue of *kārēt* (§ 6.2). We found that the penalty of *kārēt* generally involved divine action against severe breaches of the covenant, resulting in the premature death of the offender or the loss of descendants.[668] Following the work of B. Levine and Hasel, we also observed a type of divine-human cooperation in certain instances such that execution (and perhaps banishment) by human hands could be viewed as part of the process of *kārēt*.[669]

When we look at the literary structure of Num 15:30-31 and the repetition of כרת (*to cut off*), it is easy to see why *kārēt* is identified as a central concern. Given this emphasis, it remarkable that *kārēt* is identified as the inescapable and unmitigated punishment for *sinning with a high hand*, but there is no explanation about how the penalty was to be accomplished. Nevertheless, the penalties associated with the story of the Sabbath-breaker (Num 15:32-36), the narrative of Israel's rebellion (Num 11-

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[667] Milgrom (1990) 125; Bock (1998) 37 argues that the value of this passage pertains to what it says about the death penalty.

[668] *m. Karitot* 1.1-2 lists 36 offenses for which *extirpation* is the penalty, if the transgressions were intentional; but, if unintentional, a sin offering is required.

[669] We also accepted Horbury's argument that excommunication not only came to replace execution, but also was viewed as a replacement or preparation for *kārēt* during the post-exilic period. That does not come to bear in Numbers, but is pertinent to FG.

14), and the account of Korah's attempted mutiny against Moses and Aaron (Num 16) provide implicit commentary on *kārēt* and, indeed, blasphemy itself. To these accounts we now turn.

7.3 The Literary Context

7.3.1 The Sabbath-breaker

The issue of *sinning with a high hand* raised in Num 15:30-31 is immediately followed by the account of the Sabbath-breaker in Num 15:32-36. This account is similar in structure and language to the story of the blasphemer in Lev 24:10-23: (a) An offense was committed—picking up sticks on the Sabbath, (b) the offender was brought to Moses and placed in custody, (c) Moses sought Yahweh's council, and (d) finally the offender is taken outside the camp and stoned.

Although the offense is presented as a violation of the Sabbath, the exact nature of the offense is uncertain. Picking up sticks was not expressly prohibited, but picking up sticks could have been understood as working or somehow linked to kindling a fire, both of which were prohibited on the Sabbath (Exod 35:2-3). Why Moses had to consult Yahweh is also debated.[670] What is not debated is that Num 15:32-36 represents a Sabbath violation, punishable by execution or *kārēt*.[671] Furthermore, it is generally agreed that this case (Num 15:32-36), which the redactors could have been positioned anywhere in Numbers, serves to exemplify the preceding warning about *sinning with a high hand* (Num 15:30-31).[672] In other words, the Sabbath-breaker

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[670] (a) The rabbis argued that the offense violated the prohibition not to work on the Sabbath, clearly an executable offense, and that Moses only consulted Yawheh to determine the *way* in which execution was to take place (cf. *b. Sanh.* 78b; *b. Shab.* 96b; *Sifre Num* 112; and *Tg. Ps-J* on Num 15:32). (b) Milgrom (1990) 408 is not persuaded by the rabbis and believes there is enough evidence to indicate that stoning would have been the acceptable mode of execution (cf. Deut 13:11; 17:5; 21:21; Lev 20:2, 27; 24:14; and other texts). Milgrom (1990) 409-410 proposes that Num 15:32-36 (not Exod 31:12-17) provided the precedent that work on the Sabbath should be punished by both execution and *kārēt*. Moses consulted Yahweh because it was the first such case. (c) Ashley (1993) 291 rejects both explanations and suggest that Moses consulted Yahweh because the case concerned the *intent* of the stick gatherer to kindle a fire (cf. Exod 35:3).

[671] *Kārēt*, which was emphasized in Num 15:30-31, seems to take the form of *execution* in Num 15:32-36. As we have argued, execution by a human court and *kārēt* by God can be viewed as distinctive actions but, on occasion, execution can function as part of the process of *kārēt* (§ 6.2).

[672] Olson (1996) 96; Ashley (1993) 291; Milgrom (1990) 409; Bock (1998) 37; Budd (1984) 176.

epitomizes what it means *to sin with a high hand, to blaspheme God*, and *to break the commandment of Yahweh.*

Therefore, we suggest that the case of the *highhanded* Sabbath-breaker, although primarily about violating the Sabbath, is also an instance of blasphemy (cf. § 6.2). However, unlike the instance of blasphemy in Lev 24, it is non-verbal blasphemy. As if louder than words, Num 15:30-31 leads us to believe that the stick-gatherer, in full knowledge of the prohibition not to work on the Sabbath, defied Yahweh, snubbed his command, and blatantly went about working on the Sabbath. Still, like the instance of blasphemy in Lev 24, there is a dual infraction involving blasphemy plus a breach of a major commandment—the third (the Name) is violated in Lev 24 and the fourth (the Sabbath) is violated in Num 15. And, like Lev 24, the penalty is expressed in the familiar terms of *the synagogue of Israel removing the man from the community and then stoning him* (LXX Num 15:35-36; cf. Lev 24:14, 16, 23).

7.3.2 Israel's rebellion

The case of the Sabbath-breaker is not the only reference to blasphemy and its penalty of *kārēt* in Numbers. Wave after wave of rebellion against Yahweh is presented in Num 11-14, including complaints about Yahweh's provision (Num 11:1), opposition to Moses (Num 12:2), unfaithful reports about the land (Num 13:32-33), and threats against the leadership of Moses and Aaron (Num 14:2-4).[673] These uprisings are summed up or characterized in MT Num 14:11 and 23 with the term נאץ (*to despise*), a term that depicts "serious[ly] malicious acts against God"[674] and a term that is identified by Bock as one of seven key Hebrew terms used to express blasphemy in the Hebrew Bible.[675] As we have noted, נאץ is translated in LXX Num 14:11 and 23 with the term παροξύνω (*to despise*), the same term used in LXX Num 15:30 to express the blasphemy of sinning with a high hand (cf. § 7.1). The use of παροξύνω in LXX Num 14:11 and 23 sums up the rebellious actions and attitudes of both individuals (11:4; 12:1-3; 13:31-22; 14:36-38) and the community (11:1, 4, 33; 14:1-4, 39-45) and it paves the way to the verdict that anyone, even

[673] Olson (1996) 90, 97-99.
[674] Bock (1998) 32.

Israel herself, who sins highhandedly *despises* or *blasphemes the LORD*, τὸν θεὸν οὗτος παροξύνει (LXX Num 15:30).

If Israel's rebellions in the wilderness can be classified as instances of blasphemy, then we would also expect to find various individuals and Israel herself *cut off*. This is exactly what is portrayed. Although the term כרת (*to cut off*) is not used in the rebellion narratives, *kārēt* is unmistakably and emphatically portrayed when Yahweh announces that the first generation of Israelites would perish in the wilderness (14:29-30) and, as a portent of that judgment, the unfaithful spies die of the plague (14:37). The first generation of Israel is truly *cut off* from future generations.

If our analysis stands, then to characterize the Israel's rebellions in the wilderness as *blasphemous* both reinforces and seriously broadens our concept of blasphemy. First, it reinforces our understanding that blasphemy can refer to *non-verbal*, as well as verbal, offenses against God. Second, it reinforces our previous findings that blasphemy can be charged against those who *mutiny against God's leaders*, such as Moses and Aaron (Exod 22:27; cf. Num 12:2; 14:2-4). Third, it broadens our concept of blasphemy to include the type of actions and attitudes with which Israel is depicted, including *unmitigated rebellion, profound unfaithfulness* despite seeing God's signs and glory, and *blatant rejection* of God and his provision.

7.3.3 Korah's mutiny

The portrayal of Israel's rebellion continues with the mutiny of Korah and his associates against the leadership of Moses and Aaron (Num 16:1-35). Like the earlier accounts, the rebellious Korahites are characterized as *having despised the LORD*, παρώχυναν ... τὸν κύριον (LXX Num 16:3). The use of παροξύνω[676] recalls previous occurrences of the term in Numbers, particularly in Num 15:30 where it is synonymous with *sinning with a high hand* and, as we argued, *blasphemy* itself. The lexical sense of παροξύνω (*to despise* or *to blaspheme*) is shaped by each of its successive uses in Numbers such that παροξύνω accrues additional connotative

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[675] Bock (1998) 32-33 identifies גדף, קלל, חרק, נאץ, נקב, לעג, and the euphemism ברך.
[676] MT Num 16:30 has נאץ (*to despise*), the same as Num 14:11 and 23.

meaning from narrative to narrative. The accrual of additional meaning results in a unique *discourse concept*[677] of παροξύνω for Numbers. We have briefly sketched that development through Num 11-15 and have argued that παροξύνω has taken on the additional meaning of *rebellious-blasphemy* (Num 11-14) and *blatant-sinning-blasphemy* (Num 15). Now, we shall argue that one more connotation can be added to the *discourse concept*, that of *self-exaltative-blasphemy* (Num 16).

The rebellion of Korah and his followers begins with the word וַיִּקַּח, which can be translated *and [Korah] became arrogant* (Num 16:1).[678] It is followed in close succession with a second phrase, וַיָּקֻמוּ לִפְנֵי מֹשֶׁה, *and they rose up against Moses* (Num 16:2). Ironically, Korah and his Levite companions accuse Moses and Aaron of self-exaltation, "You set yourselves above the assembly of Yahweh" (עַל קְהַל יְהוָה תִּתְנַשֵּׂאוּ) (Num 16:3), and of exceeding their authority, "You have gone too far" (לָכֶם רַב), but it is they who exalt themselves and have "gone too far" (רַב לָכֶם) (Num 16:7). As the narrative moves forward,[679] Korah's opposition to Moses and Aaron blends together with a description of the Levites who greedily attempt to seize Aaron's priesthood (Num 16:10). Moses summarily condemns both Korah and the Levites for opposing Yahweh himself (Num 16:11). It suggests that, like the Sabbath-breaker, Korah's rebellion is another example of *sinning with a high hand* against Yahweh. It is an example of arrogance and greed threatening the powers of heaven by colluding to overthrow earthly authority. It is blasphemy by any other name (Exod 22:27).

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[677] On discourse concepts, see § 4.1.

[678] The meaning of וַיִּקַּח is difficult to determine, but several scholars have argued that the root is יקח (*to be bold* or *insolent*), which appears in Job 15:12; so Snaith (1967) 157-58; Ashley (1993) 298, n. 2; Budd (1984) 180; and NIV. It is obvious that Origen took וַיִּקַּח this way, since he translated it as ὑπερηφανεύθη (*he was arrogant*). Others have understood וַיִּקַּח to mean *he took* (the Qal form of לקח). This is not altogether satisfactory, since לקח is a transitive verb and yet no object is supplied. Hence, the RSV is forced to supply the word *men*, as in *he took men*, and the NRSV connects *he took* in verse 1 with the *two hundred fifty Israelites* in verse 2. Milgrom (1990) 312-13 lists ten possible solutions, but prefers to understand וַיִּקַּח reflexively, *he took himself*.

[679] The repeated reference to Korah throughout Num 16:1-35 indicates that the narrative as a whole, despite complexities regarding sources, was intended to be read as a unified story in the final form. Numbers 16 is a composite of at least three documentary sources (e.g., JE, P_g, P_s) with many redactive difficulties; so Ashley (1993) 301-2; Milgrom (1989) 414-23.

The story reaches a turning point when Korah and his associates approach the very entrance to the tent of meeting, as if to take possession of it (Num 16:19). To prove that Moses is indeed the chosen earthly authority, and not Korah and has band, Moses prophecies that Yahweh will destroy the would-be mutineers. They will die a premature death and be utterly consumed by the ground they walk on—"then you will know that these men have despised [παρώξυναν] the LORD" (Num 16:30b). By the time the reader hears that Korah and his mutineers have been labeled *despisers* of Yahweh, the term παροξύνω carries the semantic freight of several chapters of rebellion that have come to be associated with the term (Num 11-16). From chapter 16, the discourse concept of παροξύνω comes to mean *the blasphemy of arrogant self-exaltation* and *the blasphemy of illegitimately grasping for divine authority*! Admittedly, these are cumbersome phrases, but to attentive readers, the discourse concept to which these phrases point comes in the flash of a single word—παροξύνω.

Immediately after labeling Korah and the mutineers as *despisers* or *blasphemers of Yahweh*, the earth splits apart and swallows Korah and his household (Num 16:32-33) and fire comes out and consumes his co-conspirators (Num 16:35). In commenting on verse 33, Milgrom insists that this is an instance of *kārēt,* for even through "the root *kārēt* does not occur, it is replaced by the attested synonym *'ābad* (e.g., Lev 23:30; Deut 7:24)."[680] For our purposes, it is also important to note that LXX Num 16:33 has *they perished from the midst of the synagogue* (ἀπώλοντο ἐκ μέσου τῆς συναγωγῆς).[681] Statements regarding the extirpation of blasphemers from the synagogue is not uncommon in LXX[682] and may foreshadow the use of ἀποσυνάγωγος (*removed from the synagogue*) in FG.[683] The presence of the penalty of *kārēt* in Num 16:33 corroborates our argument that blasphemy is indeed the

[680] Milgrom (1991) 459.

[681] MT Num 16:33 has ויאבדו מתוך הקהל (*they perished from among the community*).

[682] Cf. LXX Lev 23:14; 23:16 and 23.

[683] The language of being extirpated or removed from the synagogue has striking similarities with the thrice repeated, but otherwise unparalleled, Johannine use of ἀποσυνάγωγος (*removed from the synagogue*; Jn 9:22, 12:42, and 16:2).

primary offense of Korah's mutiny. We can be fairly certain of this because of the 19 offenses for which *kārēt* is stipulated,[684] only blasphemy fits Korah's mutiny.

7.4 Conclusions and Prospects

Sinning with a high hand is blatant treason, lifting a war axe or spear against Yahweh. In Numbers, *sinning with a high hand* is the same thing as *blasphemy*. It can include speech, but it is primarily defiant behavior. *Sinning with a high hand* is compared to taking God's commandment, reading it, knowing it, and then throwing it to the wind as if it was worthless chaff. Such behavior is blasphemous—the contempt, the rebelliousness, the aggression against God and his leaders make it so (§ 3.6). The story of the Sabbath-breaker exemplifies *sinning with a high hand.* The problem is not simply that the Sabbath-breaker violates the Sabbath by picking up sticks. No. He deliberately sets out to violate the Sabbath. He intentionally and publicly flouts God's commandment. It is a case of individual blasphemy. The stories of Israel's rebellion and Korah's mutiny also exemplify *sinning with a high hand.* Despite seeing God's glory and tasting God's bread, the rebels call God a liar: "God is not providing what he promised, so let us chose different leaders and return to Egypt." They snub God and scorn God. It is a case of corporate blasphemy. Then there is the story of Korah's mutiny against God's leaders. It too is blasphemy. As if lifting a war axe dripping with the blood of self-exaltation, Korah puts Moses down and raises himself up. God will have none of that and Korah drops through the ground. This brings us to the issue of *kārēt.*

Kārēt is stipulated as the penalty for *sinning with a high hand* (15:30). In Numbers, we observe different ways in which *kārēt* is accomplished, but the result is the same—extirpation or destruction. The Sabbath-breaker, and whatever future progeny might have followed, is *terminated* or *cut off* through execution (15:35). The rebels also suffer the penalty of *karēt.* They are *cut off* from the promised land when they die prematurely of the plague (Num 14:27; 16:49; 25:1-18). Similarly, Korah and his mutineers are *cut off* when the ground miraculously opens and swallows them or when fire consumes them (16:32-35). There is little difference between execution by

[684] Milgrom (1991) 458.

human hands and destruction of a line by divine miracle, since the result is the same.[685]

To look ahead, since Numbers presents blasphemy as *defiant behavior* and *blatant treason* against Yahweh and, as a corollary, *self-exaltation* over God's chosen leadership, two questions emerge when we turn to FG. First, could the anti-Ἰουδαῖοι language of FG be interpreted as *highhanded sin*? That is, are there any indication that FG's criticism of the Jewish leadership, the Ἰουδαῖοι, was viewed as treason against God's chosen leadership? We will address these issues in chapter 15. Second, could FG's *exaltation of Jesus* have been understood as mutiny against the High Priest and Sanhedrin? Could FG's *exaltation of Jesus* have been understood as an *affront to God himself* in that the Johannine Jesus, like the Sabbath-breaker, takes it upon himself to interpret or the Sabbath and the Festivals of Passover, Tabernacles, and Dedication? We will address these issues in chapter 13 (§ 13.4).

[685] *Contra* Milgrom.

CHAPTER 8
THE BLASPHEMY OF SENNACHERIB
2 KINGS 18:1—19:37

Sennacherib's invasion of Judah provides another important and widely known account of blasphemy in ancient Judaism. The account of Sennacherib's invasion spans two chapters from 2 Kgs 18:1—19:37 and dramatically highlights the way in which Yahweh protected Jerusalem from destruction by the Assyrians.[686] The importance of the story is attested by the fact that it is alluded to or recounted in Isa 36:1—37:38,[687] 2 Chr 29:1—32:26,[688] 1 Macc 7:41, 2 Macc 15:22, Josephus' *Antiquities* 10.1.1-21,[689] Tobit (S)1:18, and later rabbinic traditions.[690] The account of Yahweh's protection of Jerusalem is also part of the *Zion-theology* of the Hebrew Bible, which celebrates Yahweh's kingship over and faithfulness to *Mount Zion*—the Temple—and, by metonymy, to Jerusalem and the people of Israel.[691] When all these factors are considered, it is reasonable to suppose that first-century Jews, such as the Johannine group and their non-believing opponents, were aware of the traditions of Sennacherib's blasphemy.

As with the previous texts, our analysis of Sennacherib's offense will focus on addressing two questions: What kind of *discourse concept* of blasphemy emerges from 2 Kgs 18:1—20:21? What penalty is associated with it? In an effort to address

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[686] For the Assyrian account, see Pritchard's *ANET* (1969) 287-88.

[687] Hobbs (1985; Word Biblical Commentary CD Version) shows that Isaiah's account differs only slightly from 2 Kgs. Hobbs states that Isaiah tends to abbreviate 2 Kings, but "there is no reason to emend the text of 2 Kings on the basis of the Isaiah text" since, as he assumes, Isaiah was not the source for 2 Kings.

[688] John Wright (1992) 3.190 argues that the accounts of Sennacherib and Hezekiah in 2 Kgs and 2 Chr were drawn from independent sources; hence, we have *independent attestation* of the account. There are three parallel sections: 2 Kgs 18:13-37 para. 2 Chr 32:1-29; 2 Kgs 35—20:1 para. 2 Chr 32:20-26; 2 Kgs 20:20-21 para. 2 Chr 32:32-33.

[689] John Wright (1992) 3.192 concludes that Josephus followed Herodotus' *History* 2:14-141).

[690] Sennacherib is mentioned 48 times in the Talmud (see *The Soncino Classics Collection* on CD-ROM) and is given extensive comment in *b. Sanh* 94a—95b, where he is identified as the one who "prated with inflammatory speech against the Most High" (שטח וניחר דברים בלפי מעלה) and as "the one who blasphemed" (שהירף). See also *t. Sotah* 3.18.

[691] See Levenson (1992) 6.1098-1102.

these questions, we will summarize 2 Kgs 18:1—20:21, look at Hezekiah's prayer (19:15-19), and examine Isaiah's three oracles (19:6-7; 21-34; 20:1b).

8.1 The Blasphemy of Sennacherib

The narrative of 2 Kings 18:1—20:21 sets in contrast two kings; one is intensely faithful to Yahweh, the other contemptuous to the point of blasphemy. The narrative can be divided into three parts, each corresponding to three phases of Hezekiah's reign.[692]

In the first phase (18:1-12), Hezekiah is introduced as a king who "did what was right in the sight of the LORD." He is highly praised as one who *trusted* (בטח) and *held fast to* (דבק) Yahweh, who led a religious reform, and who threw off the yoke of Assyrian domination.

The second phase of Hezekiah's reign (18:13—19:37) is dominated by the arrival of the great Assyrian army under Sennacherib, who not only seeks tribute, but also the humiliation of Hezekiah. Of course, it is Sennacherib who is humiliated, but only after pushing Judah and Hezekiah to the brink of disaster. After destroying or capturing most of the fortified cities in Judah, Sennacherib sends envoys to Hezekiah twice. The first time, the envoys come to the gates of Jerusalem and shout out their master's demands. They seek the surrender of Jerusalem, but their strategy is to undermine confidence in Hezekiah by pitching carefully crafted propaganda,[693] issuing threats,[694] and hurling insults at Hezekiah[695] and Yahweh.[696] Once Hezekiah is informed of the gravity of the situation, cloths are torn, sackcloth is put on, and

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[692] Although there are indications of multiple sources and redactions, that does not concern us here. What concerns us is the final form of the text and how that final form, which can be read as a unified story, influences the interpretation of 19:22. For various source and redaction theories, see John Wright (1993) 3.190 and Hobbs (1985; CD version of WBC on 2 Kings).

[693] For example, the Assyrian envoys cleverly remind the Israelites that Hezekiah tore down the high places of the Yahweh in order to centralize worship in Jerusalem. How can Hezekiah then assume Yahweh's protection (18:22)? What is more, the envoys claim that Yahweh told Sennacherib to destroy Judah (18:25). Using Israel's images of a golden age of prosperity, the envoys promise *life* and *land* flowing with grain, wine, oil, and honey if they surrender to Sennacherib (18:32).

[694] E.g., 18:27.

[695] Three times the envoys shout out that Hezekiah deceives Israel (18:29; 31; 32b; cf. Exod 22:27[28])).

[696] The envoys claim that, like other gods, Yahweh is impotent and cannot save Israel (18:33-35).

Isaiah is called. Isaiah announces that the Assyrians will be shaken by rumors and Sennacherib will die in his own land (19:6-7). True to Yahweh's word, Sennacherib hears rumors that Ethiopians have flanked his forces and so, rather urgently, he sends envoys a second time to Hezekiah to demand surrender. This time the envoys give Hezekiah a letter that, as we will show, blasphemes Yahweh by denying His power to protect Jerusalem. Hezekiah spreads the letter out in the Temple and pleads for Yahweh's intervention. Then, in a crucial, three-part oracle Isaiah announces that Sennacherib is condemned for his arrogance and blasphemy. The consequences follow "that very night" so that by dawn the men of Judah see one hundred eighty-five thousand dead Assyrians. Sennacherib is allowed to escape only to die an ignominious death while, ironically, worshiping a god who fails to protect him.

The third phase of Hezekiah's reign (20:1-21) reveals an unexpected twist—Hezekiah is to die. But, after beseeching Yahweh, Hezekiah is healed and lives fifteen more years.

8.2 Hezekiah's Prayer

The second time Assyrian envoys come to demand the surrender of Jerusalem, Sennacherib blasphemes or mocks (ὀνειδίζω; 19:16) Yahweh by:

- calling Yahweh a liar—"Do no let your God deceive you ..." (19:10),
- denying the power of Yahweh to save Jerusalem (19:11), and
- comparing Yahweh with other gods (19:12).

In response, Hezekiah offers prayer with two elements. The first is a request for Yahweh to hear Sennacherib's blasphemy (19:16c) and to save Jerusalem (19:19a). The second is a series of affirmations regarding the uniqueness of Yahweh—He is *God alone* (ὁ θεὸς μόνος; 19:15, 19), the *living God* (θεὸν ζῶντα; 19:16c), *the one enthroned* (ὁ καθήμενος ἐπὶ τῶν χερουβιν; 19:15a), *the creator* (19:15b), *the God of Israel* (ὁ θεὸς Ισραηλ; 19:15a), and *our God* (ὁ θεὸς ἡμῶν; 19:19a), and other gods *are not gods* (οὐ θεοί εἰσιν; 19:18). The logic of Hezekiah's prayer is straightforward. The Assyrians have called God a liar and have denied Yahweh's power to rescue Jerusalem. Thus, Yahweh's honor has been challenged which, in an

honor-shame culture, calls for a decisive response.[697] Thus, Hezekiah urges Yahweh to protect Jerusalem from the Assyrians to defend His reputation as Israel's God and as the one and only Power. As the narrative shows, Hezekiah's prayer is answered, Jerusalem is spared (19:35), and God's honor is preserved (19:19).

However, something else is at stake in addition to God's honor. Hezekiah's prayer suggests that Sennacherib threatened the *monotheistic sensibilities* of the Jews. The prayer uses no less than six out of ten forms of *monotheistic speech* found in Jewish tradition.[698] In other words, the prayer is loaded with monotheistic language and, because it comes directly after Sennacherib's blasphemous claim, it appears to function as a counter-claim. When we consider this alongside the claim of many scholars who argue that blasphemy, particularly in FG, can be understood as a *breach of monotheism* (see § 2.7), it raises a critical question: Can Sennacherib's blasphemy be understood as a breach of monotheism? In a qualified sense, we believe so. Sennacherib denied the power, if not the reality, of Yahweh, who, in Sennacherib's mind, was like all the other gods of the nations that Assyria had defeated (19:12-13). Whatever ontological status Sennacherib assigned to the gods, whether real or imaginary, he assumed that Yahweh was like them. Yahweh was just a common god, another impotent god before Assyrian power. Surely, this is a denial (or breach) of the basic monotheistic principle that Yahweh is not like other gods. Yahweh is unique and singular as the One Living God. Whereas Sennacherib claimed that *no power* could defeat Assyria, Hezekiah counter-claimed that *One Power* could. That *One Power* destroys the Assyrian army, a decisive rebuttal of Sennacherib's claim. Yahweh is not like other gods, who are made and destroyed by human hands (19:17); rather, He makes (19:15) and He destroys (19:35). He is *God alone* (ὁ θεὸς μόνος;

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[697] In the ancient Mediterranean world, honor (or public reputation) was perceived to be a limited good that could be won or lost. One way in which honor could be won (or lost) was through a form of interaction that cultural anthropologists call "challenge-response (riposte)," a verbal tug of war in which insults and slander, or compliments and praise, are exchanged. Since honor and shame are both individual and group qualities, defending the honor of the group and especially social superiors, such as God, was a basic social obligation in the ancient Mediterranean world. See Rohrbaugh (1995) 185-6; Malina (1993) chapter 2.

[698] Rainbow (1991) 83 and (1988) 66-100 identifies the following ten forms of monotheistic speech: (1) divine titles linked with adjectives like εἷς and μόνος, (2) language depicting God as monarch over all, (3) the use of *living* or *true* with God, (4) confessional formulas like *Yahweh is God,* (5) explicit denials of other gods, (6) the non-transferability of God's glory, (7) language describing

19:15, 19). Hence, Sennacherib's blasphemy breached the *monotheistic sensibilities* of the Jews.

8.3 Isaiah's Oracles

A key to understanding the blasphemy of Sennacherib lies with the oracles of Isaiah, which are dispersed throughout the narrative. The oracles not only reveal Yahweh's condemnation of Sennacherib, but also Yahweh's perspective on the motives, character, and intentions of Sennacherib.

8.3.1 First Oracle: Against Sennacherib

Isaiah's first oracle (19:6-7) flatly states that the envoys of Sennacherib have blasphemed (LXX βλασφημέω; MT גדף) Yahweh, but nevertheless Sennacherib himself is responsible and must suffer the consequences. Immediately before this oracle, Hezekiah sent word to Isaiah telling him about the disaster facing Jerusalem (19:3). However, Hezekiah's report ignores the political and military concerns and focuses on the theological crisis: Sennacherib has come *to mock the living God* (ὀειδίζειν θεὸν ζῶντα; 19:4; cf. 18:30, 32-35). Through the voice of his envoy, Sennacherib had mocked Yahweh's power and promises: First, he compared Yahweh to other gods who were impotent to save their people (18:33). Second, he mocked Yahweh's promises to Israel,[699] when he offered himself as the basis for life, blessing, and security:

> Make your peace with me and come out to me; then every one of you will eat from your own vine and your own fig tree, and drink water from your own cistern, until I come and take you away to a land like your own land, a land of grain and wine, a land of bread and vineyards, a land of olive oil and honey, that you may live and not die (18:31-32).

In this way, Sennacherib presents himself as *an alternative to Yahweh* and His provision. Sennacherib is in effect claiming to be Yahweh's rival, an alternative god, who can provide what Yahweh is unable to provide.[700] It is no wonder, then, that Sennacherib's military threat is reported to Isaiah as a threat against God's

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God as without rival, (8) language referred to God as incomparable, (9) scriptural passages like the *Shema*, and (10) restricting worship to one God.

[699] Sennacherib imitates the language of Yahweh's promises to Israel; compare 2 Kgs 18:31-32 with Exod 3:8, Num 13:23, Deut 30:19, and Jer 11:5.

[700] Nelson (1987) 239 concurs.

uniqueness and honor.[701] In an honor-shame culture, a quick-witted and decisive response is required. Isaiah's response is short and direct. Because of the distress and fear caused by hearing (ἤκουσας) the words of blasphemy (19:6), Sennacherib will become distressed and afraid at hearing a rumor (ἀκούσεται ἀγγελίαν) and will die by the sword in his own land (19:7).[702] After the oracle, the narrative shows confirmation of Isaiah's prediction; the Assyrian camp is in confusion over rumors regarding the Ethiopians (19:9) and Sennacherib perishes by the sword (19:37). Thus, the prophetic word defeats the blasphemous word and Yahweh's honor is preserved.

8.3.2 Second Oracle: Against Sennacherib

Isaiah's second oracle (19:21-34) is the longest and the most substantial. As in the previous oracle, Yahweh engages Sennacherib in word-battle, this time defending *His honor* (vv. 21-28), *the remnant of Judah* (vv. 29-31), and *Jerusalem* (vv. 32-34).[703] We will focus on the first part, which is an oracle directed against Sennacherib,[704] but can also be read as a *defense of Yahweh's honor.* In Yahweh's defense, three witnesses come forth.[705]

The first witness is the city of Jerusalem, the *virgin daughter Zion*, the victim whom Sennacherib has come to rape (vv. 21-23a). Initially, she says nothing, though inwardly she *despises* (בוז) and *scorns* (לעג) Sennacherib and outwardly she shakes her head mockingly (19:21). She has been threatened with rape, but it was not just a threat against her. To threaten her is to mock and blaspheme Yahweh. To make her point, she presents parallel questions and answers within which two verbal roots—*blaspheme* (חרף) and *raise up* (רום)—form the thematic center (19:22-23a):[706]

A Whom have you *blasphemed* (חפרת) and reviled?
  B Against whom have you *raised* (הרימות) your voice?
  B' You *lifted* your eyes *on high* (ותשא) against the Holy One of Israel;
A' By your messengers you *blasphemed* (חרקת) the Lord.

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[701] Cohn (2000) 133.

[702] The content of the rumor only becomes evident in 19:9.

[703] We renamed each sub-unit, but follow the three-part division by Cohn (2000) 136-38 and Hobbs (1985; Word Biblical Commentary CD Version). Gray (1970) 688-94 divides it into five parts and Watts (1987) 41-44 divides the parallel oracle in Isa 37:22-35 into four.

[704] So Cohn (2000) 137.

[705] Cohn (2000) 137 identified them as *three voices.*

[706] Following Long (1991) 118-9.

The chiastic structure is composed of two synonymous parallelisms. There is conceptual parallelism between lines A and B and between B' and A'. When we read line A and line B synoptically, blasphemy is equivalent to verbal assault against Yahweh—*raising one's voice*. When we read line B' and line A' synoptically, blasphemy is equivalent to self-exaltation above Yahweh—*lifting one's eyes on high*. Put together, the chiastic pattern stresses that Sennacherib's blasphemy has both verbal and non-verbal aspects.

What is important to note is Sennacherib's threat to Jerusalem is simultaneously interpreted as *blasphemy against* and *self-exaltation above* Yahweh. That is, the way in which Sennacherib exalts himself (against Jerusalem and Yahweh) is blasphemy. LXX 4 Kgdms 19:22 (= Isa 37:23) states that Sennacherib *raised* (ὕψωσας) *his voice*, or shouted at God,[707] and *lifted his eyes toward heaven* (ὕψος).[708] Ὑψόω literally means *to raise* something up,[709] but often implies *to exalt*.[710] The language of exaltation in Isa 37:23 (= 4 Kgdms 19:22) recalls the vision of Isa 6:1, where Yahweh is sitting on a *high* (ὑψηλοῦ) and *exalted* (ἐπηρμένου) throne. In this way, the language of 4 Kgdms 19:22 (= Isa 37:23) creates an image of Sennacherib attempting a heavenly ascent, even to the throne of God, providing one of the strongest statements of self-exaltation in the LXX tradition.[711] Thus, the *virgin daughter of Zion* accuses Sennacherib of attempted rape, which is *self-exaltative blasphemy* against God, hubris and shame of the highest level.[712]

The second witness is Sennacherib himself, a voice imagined by the *virgin daughter of Zion* (vv. 23b-24). Sennacherib lists his exploits like a god, using the emphatic *I*

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[707] Cf. LXX Gen 39:15.

[708] E.g., see LXX Isa 7:11; 40:26; Ps 101:20 where ὑψόω refers to *heaven*.

[709] Like a boat (LXX Gen 7:17) or a head (LXX 2 Kgdms 25:27).

[710] Ὑψόω is used in reference to exalting Yahweh (LXX Ps 96:9), God (LXX Ps 107:6), the Name (LXX Ps 34:3), the righteous (LXX Job 36:7), the Servant of Yahweh (LXX Isa 52:13), and the Temple (LXX Isa 2:2). The substantival form, ὁ ὕψιστος (*the most high*), is used 70 times in LXX as a title for God (most often in Psalms, Daniel, and Sirach).

[711] Sennacherib's hubris is matched only by the King of Babylon (Isa 14:12-21), the King of Tyre (Ezek 28:1-10), and Antiochus IV (Dan 11:36-39; cf. 2 Macc 9:12), each of whom are accused of aspiring to become a god.

(אבי)—*I have ascended, I have cut down, I have reached, I have dug, I have dried up.* Each boast refers to a superlative accomplishment regarding the *highest* mountains, the *loftiest* cedars, the *tallest* cypresses, the *farthest* places, and *all* the tributaries of the Nile. However, the braggadocio only serves to incriminate Sennacherib of superlative arrogance and foolishness, for Sennacherib has not laid a picture of military conquests before us, but in the eyes of Jews, a preposterous claim to tame nature like a god![713]

The third witness is Yahweh, who puts Sennacherib's boasting into proper perspective (vv. 25-28). Yahweh states that it was He who decided and planned to use Sennacherib for His purpose which, of course, makes Sennacherib only a two-bit player on the world's stage. Furthermore, Yahweh reveals that He knows Sennacherib through-and-through, including Sennacherib's *arrogance* (שַׁאֲנָן) and *rage* (רִגְזְךָ) against Him (v. 28a-b). Sennacherib is described like a *raging* (רִגְזְךָ) animal out of control, consumed by *self-exaltative blasphemy,* so the oracle ends fittingly by stating that Yahweh will bridle him and lead him back to Nineveh in shame (v. 28c-d).

Thus, in the battle of honor and shame, the three witnesses make a laughingstock of Sennacherib; he who would claim divinity, to have tamed nature, is but an animal that must be tamed himself.

8.3.3 Third Oracle: Against Hezekiah

Isaiah's third oracle (20:1b), coming shortly after Sennacherib's shameful death, reveals that Hezekiah must die too. In the Deuteronomistic account of 2 Kings, the prophecy is unexpected. Nothing braces the reader to absorb such a punishing blow, especially since Hezekiah remained faithful to Yahweh through his reign. However, the account in 2 Chronicles adds an important piece of information. After Sennacherib's defeat, Yahweh exalted Hezekiah in the sight of all the nations

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[712] Arrogance is detested in Jewish tradition. It is God's prerogative to exalt people (LXX Ezek 17:24; Job 17:4; Jas 4:10; 1 Pet 5:6) and those who exalt themselves are thrown down (LXX Prov 18:12; Isa 2:11; Ezek 21:26).

[713] So Cohn (2000) 137.

(ὑπερήρθη; LXX 2 Chr 32:23) and, in a twist of fate, Hezekiah became *proud* and *his heart was lifted up* (ὑψώθη ἡ καρδία; LXX 2 Chr 32:25). However, unlike Sennacherib, Hezekiah was healed because *he humbled himself* (ἐταπεινώθη; LXX 2 Chr 32:26). This reinforces one of the primary themes of the Hezekiah-Sennacherib narrative that Yahweh detests *arrogance,* which was a primary characteristic of Sennacherib's blasphemy.

The first, second, and third oracles of Isaiah are linked by a common theme. Each condemns *making oneself great* vis-à-vis Yahweh and each, in its own way, clarifies the nature of Sennacherib's blasphemy as *verbal rape and mockery, self-exaltation and arrogance, foolish boasting and uncontrolled rage.*

8.4 Conclusions and Prospects

Based on our understanding of βλασφημέω the the sense relationships it has with various partial synonyms and hyponyms (see Chapter 4), it is reasonable to suppose that first-century Jews and Christians would have classified Sennacherib's action as blasphemous, even if key terms like βλασφημέω had not been used in the narrative. However, as one reads 2 Kgs 18:1—20:21, the narrative adds color and definition to the type of blasphemy perpetrated by Sennacherib, so that, by the end of the account, a unique *discourse concept* of Sennacherib's blasphemy can be discerned.

Although Sennacherib's blasphemy can be characterized in a number of ways, it is perhaps best summed up as *self-exaltative blasphemy* against Israel and therefore against God. His blasphemy was a *verbal offense* mediated by his envoys through voice (18:28) and letter (19:14). However, it was more than a verbal offense. Isaiah's oracles make it clear that Sennacherib's *attitude* and *action* toward Jerusalem and Yahweh were blasphemous. Because Sennacherib laid siege to God's city and arrogated divine status for himself, Isaiah characterizes Sennacherib's attitude as *arrogant, foolishly boastful,* and *self-exaltative.* In a world where honor was perceived as a limited good, Sennacherib's acclamations of divinity and his threat to plunder Jerusalem was tantamount to robbing God of His honor. This would have violated Jewish monotheistic sensitivities in that Sennacherib was attempting to take

what belonged to God alone. Sennacherib breached monotheistic sensitivities in other ways as well. When Sennacherib compared Yahweh to other gods, he denied and insulted Yahweh's unique reality and power. When Sennacherib offered himself as an alternative to Yahweh—*Come out to me and I will give you your own vine, fig tree, cistern, and a land of olive oil and honey* (18:31-32)—he offered what only God could offer, violating and insulting Yahweh's claim to have no rivals.

To look ahead, in chapter 13, we will consider whether the Johannine exaltation of Jesus could have been viewed as blasphemous, particularly when we consider a number of connotations associated with *Sennacherib-like-blasphemy*. For example, just as Sennacherib was accused of blasphemy by *lifting himself up* (ὑψόω) above God and the people of God, so also FG uses the term ὑψόω five times for Jesus (3:14 [twice]; 8:28; 12:32, 34), each with a double meaning referring to Jesus' crucifixion and to his exaltation to heaven.

CHAPTER 9
THE BLASPHEMY OF ANTIOCHUS
1 MACCABEES 1:20—2:14

1 and 2 Macc depict two blasphemous figures relevant to our examination of FG: Antiochus Epiphanes and Nicanor. In their blasphemy, both figures displayed great arrogance, both acted and spoke contemptuously of the Jews, both threatened or profaned the Temple, both brushed aside God. However, Antiochus goes further than Nicanor in that his blasphemies entailed a claim to be equal with God.[714]

It is likely that the Johannine Jewish-Christians and their non-believing Jewish counterparts were acquainted with the stories of Antiochus and Nicanor. The Maccabean histories were originally written in Hebrew[715] and, based on the number of copies and versions still extant, we can infer that the Maccabean literature was popular and had widespread appeal.[716] Even if most first-century Jews did not have direct access to 1 and 2 Macc, we can assume they had knowledge of Antiochus and Nicanor from oral sources or from written ones, such as Daniel[717] and Jason of Cyrene.[718] The writings of Josephus confirm that first-century Jews not only knew about Antiochus and Nicanor, but also regarded their infamy as significant.[719] Indeed, later references in Talmudic literature testify to the long-term impact of Antiochus

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[714] 2 Macc 9:12; cf. 9:28.

[715] The Hebrew text is no longer extant, but Origin (ca. 184-254 C.E.) and Jerome (ca. 345-420) refer to Hebrew versions; see Goldstein (1976) 14-16.

[716] So Goldstein (1975) 175 and (1983) 124. Textual witnesses include Greek uncials (A, ℵ, and V) and minuscules (particularly the Lucianic recension represented by $L^{64, 236, 281, 534, 728}$), the Old Latin ($La^{X}$ and La^{L}), the Syriac (Sy), the Armenian (Arm), and quotations from early Christian authors (particularly Lucifer of Cagliari).

[717] Dan 7, 8, and 11 may allude to Antiochus.

[718] 2 Macc 2:23 states that a five-volume history by Jason of Cyrene, which is no longer extant, is a primary source for the work. Goldstein (1983) 32-41 argues that 1 and 2 Macc also drew material from common sources, including a hypothetical "Seleucid Chronicle" and a hypothetical "Common Jewish Source." In addition, Goldstein (1976) 90-103 and (1983) 35-37 argues that Jason of Cyrene used different sources, including two hypothetical sources, *DMP* (a martyrdom source) and the *Memoirs of Onias IV* (a propaganda source from Ptolemaic Egypt).

[719] For Antiochus, see *Ant.* 12.3-9, 13.5-8, and *B.J.* 1.1, 1.6. For Nicanor, see *Ant.* 12.402-12 and *B.J.* 3.8.

and Nicanor on Jewish consciousness.[720] Hence, it is likely that stories about Antiochus and Nicanor formed part of the shared knowledge in which first-century Jews had been socialized, including the Jewish community in which FG was produced.

In this chapter, we will focus on the Antiochus' blasphemy, particularly as it is portrayed 1 Macc 1:20—2:14, and in the following chapter, we will focus on Nicanor's blasphemy, particularly 2 Macc 14:26—15:37.

9.1 The Literary Context

In the opening chapter of 1 Macc, the Hasmonean Propagandist (hereafter HP) begins by mentioning the victories, arrogance, and death of Alexander the Great (1:1-7) and then turns immediately to a "second Alexander," the Seleucid king, Antiochus Epiphanes, who is identified as a *sinful root.*[721] Although the name *Epiphanes* has a wide range of meaning,[722] historical evidence indicates that we should understand it as the *manifest* [god].[723] Indeed, as the first chapters unfold, the plans of Antiochus, the manifest god, are shown to be contrary to the plans of Israel's God; thus, the events depicted in 1 Macc reveal a battle between rival gods.[724] Antiochus is also identified as a *sinful root*, probably because his policies of Hellenization were embraced by certain Jews (1:11-15), who are called *sinners*[725] and *apostates from the holy covenant.*[726] Over against Antiochus and the Hellenistic sympathizers are the Hasmonaeans (Mattathias, his sons, and their followers), who are characterized as *zealous for the law*[727] and *doers of the law.*[728] Thus, 1 Macc present two parallel

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[720] For Antiochus, see *b. Shab.*21b, 60a, 130a; *Pesach* 93b; *Yoma* 16a; *Gittin* 57b; *Kid* 66a; *Sanh* 32b. For Nicanor, see *b. Ta'an.* 18b; *y. Meg.*1.70c (Neusner 1.4); *y. Ta'an.* 2.66a (Neusner 2.12).

[721] ῥίζα ἁμαρτωλὸς (1:10).

[722] Goldstein (1976) 198 sites Mørkhom's study, which identifies a wide range of meaning for *Epiphanes*, from *famous* to *illustrious* to the *appearing* or *manifesting* of a god.

[723] Goldstein (1976) 198 states that Antiochus was identified as *King Antiochus Theos Epiphanes* on his coins, on an inscription from Babylon, and in a letter to the Samaritans.

[724] 1 Macc. does not use the term *God*, but prefers the term *Heaven.*

[725] ἁμαρτωλός (2:44, 48).

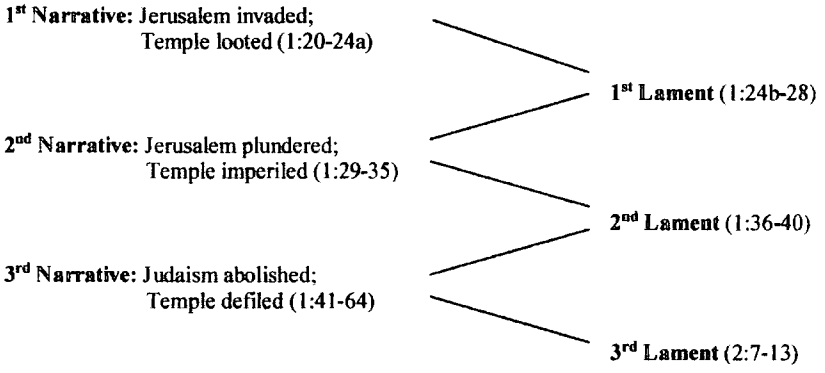
[726] ἀπέστησαν ἀπὸ διαθήκης ἁγίας (1:15). They are also called *lawless ones* (παράνομοι; 1:11), *reversers of circumcision* (ἐποίησαν ἑαυτοῖς ἀκροβυστίας; 1:15), *sinful people* (ἔθνος ἁμαρτωλόν; 1:34), and *the sons of arrogance* (τοὺς υἱοὺς τῆς ὑπερηφανίας; 2:47).

[727] ὁ ζηλῶν τῷ νόμῳ (2:26, 27, 50).

[728] τοὺς ποιητὰς τοῦ νὸμου (2:67).They are also called *Israel* (Ισραηλ; 1:53), *seekers of righteousness* (ζητοῦντες δικαιοσύνην; 2:29) and *strong in the law* (ἰσχύσατε ἐν τῷ νόμῳ; 2:64).

battles; one between rival gods and the other between (Jewish and non-Jewish) Hellenists and law-observant Jews.

In the opening chapters, the battleground is organized around three narratives. The narratives portray atrocities perpetrated against law-observant Jews; first, by Antiochus, who invades Jerusalem and loots the Temple (1:20-24a); then, by Antiochus' collector of tribute, who plunders Jerusalem and builds an intimidating citadel next to the Temple (1:29-35); and finally, by Antiochus' hatchet men, who abolish Judaism, kill Jewish adherents, and profane the altar (1:41-64). Following each set of atrocities, a lament or poem interprets the events and implicitly provides justification for the Hasmonaeans to wage war against the Hellenists and their Jewish sympathizers:



9.2 The Blasphemies of Antiochus

To get to the heart of Antiochus' blasphemies, we will focus on the third narrative (1:41-64) and the third lament (2:7-13). These two units are linked by a description of the patriarch of the Hasmonaean dynasty, Mattathias, who offers the third lament on behalf of Israel. The lament is framed by the introduction in 2:6 and the conclusion in 2:14, both of which reinforce the point that *blasphemy* is the issue:

Introduction: 2:6 He saw the blasphemies [τάς βλασφημίας] being committed in Judah and Jerusalem. (NRSV)

Conclusion: 2:14 Then Mattathias and his sons tore their clothes, put on sackcloth, and mourned greatly. (NRSV)

The introduction refers to *the blasphemies* (τάς βλασφημίας), which both points back to the atrocities mentioned in the third narrative (1:41-64)—and possibly to the

first and the second narratives as well—and forward to the interpretation in the third lament (2:7-13). The conclusion punctuates both the third narrative and the lament and highlights the desperate situation facing Mattathias and his sons. They tear their clothes and cover themselves with sackcloth. Such gestures indicate great despair[729] or even remorse for covenantal unfaithfulness,[730] but they also may signal the perception and condemnation of blasphemy.[731]

When we turn to the third narrative, a series of atrocities and offenses can be observed. Antiochus sets forth decrees that aim at unifying his kingdom by eliminating religious practices and customs contrary to his own (1:40-43). The decrees abolish Judaism and authorize Antiochus' enforcers to violate the Temple and kill law-observant Jews. The offenses can be grouped into two types: *verbal offenses* in the form of written decrees by Antiochus that contradict the law of God, and *non-verbal offenses* in the form of repressive and violent acts by Antiochus' hatchet men that violate the law of God.

Verbal Offenses instructing people:	*Non-Verbal Offenses* involving:
to follow foreign customs (1:44b)	forsaking the law (1:52)
to forbid sacrifices and offerings to God (1:45a)	doing evil in the land (1:53)
to profane the sabbaths or festivals (1:45b)	building an abomination on the altar (1:54b)
to desecrate the sanctuary and priests (1:46)	building altars throughout Judah (1:54c)
to build altars and shrines to idols (1:47a)	burning the books of the law (1:56)
to sacrifice unclean animals (1:47b)	using violence against Israel (1:58)
to leave boys uncircumcised (1:48a)	offering an unholy sacrifice on the altar (1:59)
to defile themselves with unclean things (1:48b)	killing Jews who circumcised boys (1:60-61V)

The verbal and non-verbal offenses, taken individually or together, do not in and of themselves constitute blasphemy. For example, failure to circumcise, while breaking the covenantal law, is not in itself blasphemy. What makes the verbal and non-verbal offenses blasphemous is *the intent ascribed to Antiochus*; he imposed his decrees *so that they would forget the law and change all the ordinances* (1:49). In this way, Antiochus is perceived to have flouted the covenantal law and thus God Himself. Antiochus intentionally snubbed God.[732] Similarly, the desecration of the altar (1:54,

[729] E.g., 2 Kgs 6:30.
[730] E.g., Jer 4:8; Joel 1:13.
[731] E.g., 2 Kgs 19:1; Isa 37:1; Mk 14:63-64.
[732] Much like *sinning with a high hand*; cf. the analysis of Num 15:30-31 in § 7.1.

59) is portrayed as an intentional violation of God's Temple. It is no wonder that the verbal and non-verbal offenses are identified as *the blasphemies* in 2:6. Thus, the third narrative, provides evidence that blasphemy in early Judaism could entail a broad range of verbal and non-verbal offenses. As such, HP's conception of blasphemy is at the opposite end of the spectrum from Jewish interpretations that restrict blasphemy to the inappropriate vocalization of the divine name.[733]

9.3 The Lament of 2 Macc 2:7-13

When we turn to the third lament, the multitude of blasphemies mentioned in chapter one merge into one representive blasphemy against the Temple and the Holy City. Through the voice of Mattathias, the Lament is structured around three declarations, three questions, and two exclamations and is thematically bound by nine references to the Holy City (double underline) and eight to the Temple (underlined).

Exclamation: 2:7 "Alas!

Questions: Why was I born
to see this,
the ruin of my people,
the ruin of the holy city [τῆς ἁγίας πόλεως], and
to dwell there
when it [αὐτὴν] was given over to the enemy,
the sanctuary [τὸ ἁγίασμα] given over to aliens?

Declarations: 2:8 Her [αὐτῆς] temple [ὁ ναὸς] has become like a man without honor.
2:9 Her [αὐτῆς] glorious vessels [τὰ σκεύη] have been carried into captivity.
Her [αὐτῆς] babes have been killed in her streets.
Her [αὐτῆς] youths by the sword of the foe.

Questions: 2:10 What nation
has not inherited *her* palaces [βασίλεια] and
has not seized her [αὐτῆς] spoils?

Declarations: 2:11 All her [αὐτῆς] adornment has been taken away;
instead of a free woman [ἐλευθέρας],
she has become a slave.

Exclamation: 2:12 Behold!

Declarations: Our holy place [τὰ ἅγια],
our beauty [ἡ καλλονὴ], and
our glory [ἡ δόξα]
have been laid waste;
the Gentiles have profaned it [αὐτὰ].

Question: 2:13 Why should we live any longer?" (Author's Trans.)

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[733] Cf. our discussion on Lev 24:16 in § 6.3 and *Tg. Ps-J.* on Exod 24:16, *Tg. Onq.* on Exod 24:16, *m. Sanh.* 7:5, and *m. Šebu.* 4:13.

Given the number of verbal and non-verbal offenses cited in the third narrative, it is extraordinary that the lament primarily focuses on the affront to Jerusalem and its Temple.[734]

> Although our observation that there are nine references to the Holy City is not controversial, our claim that the lament refers to the sanctuary or holy place eight times could be disputed and therefore our claim deserves comment. First, the reference to *the temple* (ὁ ναὸς) in 2:8 could be challenged on text-critical grounds. Goldstein suggests that 2:8 should be read as "Her people [λαὸς] acted like a base coward." His argument is not convincing and so we follow the RSV, NRSV, and NAB.[735] Second, the term τὰ σκεύη in 2:9 could be a reference to some type of *body armor*, as it is in 3:3 and 4:30; however, the preceding chapter used the term to refer to the Temple *furnishings* or *utensils* in 1:21) and to its costly *vessels* in 1:23. Given the reference to *the sanctuary* (τὸ ἁγìασμα) in 2:7, *the temple* (ναὸς) in 2:8, and *our holy place* (τὰ ἅγια ἡμῶν) in 2:12, it is likely the use of σκεύη in 2:9 pertains to objects of the Temple, not body armor. Third, the best textual witnesses[736] have βασίλεια in 2:10. The word could be the feminine noun βασιλεία (*kingdom*), in which case 2:10 would read: "What nation has not inherited her *kingdom*?" The NAB and Goldstein prefer this.[737] Conversely, the word could be the plural neuter noun of βασίλειον (*palace*), in which case 2:10 would be: "What nation has not inherited her *palaces*?" This is preferred by the RSV and NRSV, which we adopt on the basis of contextual considerations—the Jerusalem Temple was often referred to as a *palace* or היכל,[738] which fits the context of the lament.

Thus, the lament has a remarkable number of references to Jerusalem and its Temple. *It is as if all specific offenses have been rolled into one symbolic violation of Jerusalem and its Temple.*

9.4 The Temple Symbolism

When we consider that HP summed up *the blasphemies* referred to in 2:6 by focusing on the Jerusalem Temple in 2:7-13, what does that signal about the nature of Antiochus' blasphemies? Certainly, the Jerusalem Temple was the focal point of

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[734] Jerusalem and the Temple can be thought of as one, united symbol. Mount Zion referred to the Temple Mount and, by extension, the entire temple-city of Jerusalem; so Levenson (1993) 6.1098-99. As N.T. Wright (1992) states, "It [Jerusalem] was not so much a city with a temple in it; more like a temple with a small city round it."

[735] Like the RSV, NRSV and NAB, our translation uses *temple* (ναὸς), following A, ℵ, La^{B}, La^{V}, and Syl. In contrast, Goldstein (1976) 231 prefers to read *people* (λαὸς), following minuscules 93 and 311, La^{LXG}, and Lucifer (an early Christian author). Based on external criteria, reading the *temple* (ναὸς) is stronger, since A and ℵ date about 500 years earlier than La^{L} and La^{X}, which are Goldstein's best textual witnesses. His belief that La^{L} and La^{X} seem to preserve the old Latin, as reflected in Cyprian (ca. 200), which *may* be close to an earlier Hebrew version is too speculative to be convincing (177-8). Based on internal criteria, Goldstein (1976) 231 states that "the context demands the reading *laos*," whereas *naos* would present an "odd" reading. However, *contra* Goldstein, the immediate context seems to concern the sanctuary and the holy place (2:7cd, 9a).

[736] A, La^{LXG}, and a wide range of minuscules.

[737] Goldstein (1976) 232.

[738] Cf. Jer 7:4; 24:1; 50:11; 2 Chr 26:16; 27:2; 29:16; Ps 11:4; 1 Macc 2:10.

Jewish national life.[739] It was the political, economic, and religious center of Israel. Indeed, the life of the Jewish people was intertwined with the fate of Jerusalem and its Temple. It was assumed that whatever happened to the Temple was thought to have happened to Israel and vice versa.[740] Thus, the degradation and blasphemy of the Temple would have been tantamount to degradation and blasphemy against God's people. But, more can be said about Antiochus' blasphemy, if we consider three dimensions of the religious, even mythic, symbolism of the Temple.

First, Mount Zion—Jerusalem and its Temple—symbolized *the dwelling-place of God on earth*. To assault a temple, as Antiochus did, was as direct as humanly possible to striking a transcendent deity. When he plundered and profaned the Temple, he attacked and blasphemed the very Name that dwelled there. Hence, one need not vocalize the Name to profane it, since blaspheming the Temple is to blaspheme the Name.

> A central text is Exod 15:17, which states that Yahweh planted Israel on His mountain and made it His dwelling-place and sanctuary. After the Temple was constructed, Solomon declared that it was Yahweh's dwelling-place forever.[741] For some Jews, Yahweh was so connected to the Temple that He is addressed and praised as a personified Zion rather than God.[742] Conversely, Isaiah 8:14 speaks of Yahweh as if He were a sanctuary. In early traditions, *the Name* became a synonym for the presence of Yahweh; to speak of the Name dwelling in the Temple was to say that God was there.[743] However, in later Deuteronomistic traditions, anthropomorphisms were disavowed, God's transcendence was stressed, and the Name, while still dwelling in the Temple, was no longer the literal presence of Yahweh.[744] Still, whatever ontological status is assigned the Name, there is no denying that the Name was thought to dwelled in the Temple, that God was present in some special way, and the purity and the sanctity of the Temple had to be preserved because of it. This is evident from the way in which the Temple was protected from defilement by what came to be known as the *ten degrees of holiness*, a pattern of concentric circles moving from the boundaries of Israel's land inward toward the most holy inner sanctuary of the Temple.[745] With each

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[739] Dunn (1991) 31-35; N.T. Wright (1992) 224-26.

[740] 2 Macc 5:19-20.

[741] 1 Kgs 8:10-13; cf. Ezek 43:7.

[742] 4Q88 *Hymn to Zion* [= 4QPs^{f}], col VIII; cf. Is 8:14, which speaks of Yahweh becoming a sanctuary.

[743] Barker (1992) 97-98; e.g., Ps 20:1-2; Ps 54:1; Ps 118:10-13.

[744] Barker (1992) 99-102 believes that the Deuternomistic authors suppressed anthropomorphic traditions. For example, 1 Kgs 8:27 and 2 Sam 7:5, 13 seem to indicate the suppression of anthropomorphism and substitution of *the Name* for the notion of God's literal presence.

[745] *m. Kelim* 1.6-9 (trans. by Danby [1933] 605-6) states: "There are ten degrees of holiness. The Land of Israel is holier than any other land .... The walled cities [of the Land of Israel] are still more holy .... Within the wall [of Jerusalem] is still more holy .... The Temple Mount is still more holy .... The Rampart is still more holy .... The Court of the Women is still more holy .... The Court of the Israelites is still more holy .... The Court of the Priests is still more holy .... Between the Porch and the Altar is still more holy .... The Sanctuary is still more holy .... The Holy of Holies is still more holy, for none may enter therein save only the High Priest on the Day of Atonement."

> degree of holiness there was greater restriction regarding who or what may enter. In this way, the Temple and the Name were protected from defilement. As Jubilees portrays it, "God's Name dwells in the sanctuary (32:10; 49:21; cf. 49:19, 20), and is so bound up with it that defilement of the Temple can be spoken of in the same breath as profanation of God's holy Name (30:15; cf. very closely 23:21)."[746] Similarly, 2 Macc 8:2-4 links profaning the Temple and violating the Jews with blaspheming the Name. After the destruction of the Second Temple, 4 Ezra expresses the same sentiment: To pollute the Temple is to profane the Name.[747]

Second, Jerusalem and its Temple symbolized *the cosmic center of the universe* and the place where *heaven and earth converged.*[748] To plunder and defile the Temple, as Antiochus did, threatened to sever the link between heaven and earth. And it threatened the stability of the world that Israel and her Temple Service were perceived to provide. In his attempt to suspend Judaism and the Temple Service, Antiochus interfered with the divine order and arrogated for himself the prerogatives that belonged to God alone—blasphemy by any other name.

> Throughout scripture and Jewish literature, the Temple is presented as the access point to heaven. For example, Isaiah 6:1-5 presents a vision of God enthroned in the heavenly Temple with his train flowing down to fill the earthly Temple, signifying access to heaven.[749] The idea that the Temple was an access point to heaven is reinforced by the story of Jacob's ladder in Gen 28:10-28. In a vision, Jacob sees a ladder stretching from heaven to earth and, while angels ascend and descend on it, the LORD stands above and speaks to him. Afterward, Jacob identifies the place as the *house of God* (בית אלהים) and *the gate of heaven* (שער השמים).[750] In addition, both Philo and Josephus view the Temple as the center of the cosmos, the high priest as mediator between heaven and earth, and the sacrifices as effective for the whole world.[751] Moreover, as Hayward has demonstrated, *Liber Antiquitatum Biblicarum* (Pseudo-Philo) presents the Temple as inextricably bound up with Israel as *the vine* mentioned in Exod 15:17 and as the "*axis mundi*, holding together the abyss, earth, and the heaven."[752] At one point in *LAB*, Moses pleads with God to have mercy on Israel because, should *the vine* be destroyed, the link that holds the universe together would cease to exist and everything would be for nothing.[753] In this view, for God to forsake *the vine* that He planted on the Temple hill is to forsake creation itself. Scripture and Jewish tradition also present the Temple as the earthly replication of the heavenly sanctuary. A foundational text is Exod 25:9-40, which portrays the tabernacle and its

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[746] Hayward (1996) 86; cf. *Spec.* 1.66-67, 97.

[747] "For you see that our sanctuary has been laid waste, our altar thrown down, our temple destroyed .... our holy things have been polluted and the name by which we are called has been profaned." 4 Ezra 10:22 in *OTP* 2.546.

[748] Meyers (1992) 6.359-60; Hayward (1996) 8-10.

[749] So Nickelsburg and Stone (1991) 57. The inner sanctuary was conceived of as the place where God, who is enthroned in heaven above the cherubim (see Haran [1985] 246-54; e.g., Is 37:16), rests His feet below on the Ark of the Covenant as His footstool (Haran [1985] 254-55; e.g., 1 Chr 28:2).

[750] Although Gen 28:10-28 is referring to Bethel, not Jerusalem, the principle is the same.

[751] Hayward (1996) 109ff. and 152-3. Even though Philo's explanations of the Temple and its Service were influenced by Greek thought, he shares this view with other Jews, such as Jesus ben Sira, *Aristeas*, and the Jews of Qumran (140).

[752] Hayward (1996) 160-61 and 166-67, esp. 167.

[753] *LAB* 12.8-9; cf. 18.10; 23.12; 28.4; 30.4; 39.7.

> furnishings as replicas of the heavenly pattern.[754] Later, Rabbis thought of the earthly Temple as corresponding to the heavenly dwelling such that the throne of God's glory aligned with the earthly sanctuary.[755] Some Jews went further in correlating heaven and earth by extending it to the service of the priests, the observance of the Sabbath and festival observance, and the keeping the law.[756] Thus, the Temple and its services, its daily sacrifices and annual feasts, even Israel's observance of the laws, are heavenly things replicated on earth.

Third, Jerusalem and its Temple symbolized *Israel's election*. When the Temple was profaned and Israel's Services were terminated, Israel's election as a priestly kingdom and a holy nation were thrown into doubt. It is likely that HP understood the blasphemies of Antiochus as the way in which God was chastising Israel for their apostasy.[757] Thus, Mattathias' lament functions as a call for Jews to wake up, see what their apostasy is doing, and return to their elective vocation.

> God chose Israel as a priestly kingdom and a holy nation (Exod 19:6), He chose to live among them (Exod 15:17), and He chose the city and the Temple (Deut 12:13-14).[758] Before the Temple was built, the site was marked out by a theophany (2 Sam 24:16; 2 Chr 3:1). Deuteronomy emphasizes that Yahweh selected Mount Zion among all the tribes as a dwelling for His Name (Deut 12:5). Initially, the *place* was never identified by name, but later it was recognized as Jerusalem and its Temple, probably as a result of Yahweh's choice of David and His promise that his dynasty would endure in Jerusalem (2 Char 6:5-6; 1 Kgs 11:13, 32). When Sennacherib was repelled from his siege of Jerusalem in 701, Jerusalem and its Temple became visible signs of God's election of Israel. The destruction of the first Temple in 587 B.C.E. shook that confidence, but the rebuilding of the second Temple in 515 B.C.E. rekindled the notion of Israel's election.

In sum, Jerusalem and its Temple were the political, economic, and religious center of Israel. What happened to this center happened to Israel. Beyond that we speculate that by focusing on the center, the third lament could succinctly express the catastrophe facing all Israel and, at the same time, tacitly evoke very powerful cultic, cosmic, and covenantal symbolism. By evoking such symbolism, the lament announced that Antiochus' blasphemies had struck the center of all that was good and true and beautiful; he had *struck* God, *shaken* the foundations of heaven and earth,

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[754] Also see, for example, Ps 48:1-4; Ezekiel's vision of a new Temple in Ezek 40-48; Josephus *Ant.* 3.180-2; Heb 9:1-24.

[755] Cf. Hayward (1996) 159 and *b. Ber.* 33b; *Mek. de R. Ishmael Shirta* 10:24-28; *Gen. Rab.* 55:8; *Exod. Rab.* 33:3; *Tg. Ps.-J.* on Exod 15:17.

[756] Hayward (1996) 87 and 96-7 points out that Jubilees understood the Temple-feasts to replicate the cycle of feasts in heaven (*Jub.* 6:22-31) and the service of priests to correlate with the service of the highest angels in heaven (*Jub.* 30:14; 31:14). Hayward (1996) 88 also notes that some Jews believed that they were "like the angels who serve before the Lord, when they carry out the commandments summed up in the law of *ṣiṣith*, the fringes of garments" (*Tg. Ps.-J.* on Num 15:40).

[757] Cf. 1 Macc 1:64; cf. 2 Macc 5:17b-18, 20b and Ezek 8:1—10:22.

[758] This paragraph follows de Vaux (1961) 327-8.

and *signaled* the end of Israel's service. The lament emphasized the magnitude of Antiochus' blasphemy and functioned to call Israel to renewed faithfulness.

9.5 Antiochus as God and Blasphemer

Next, we will briefly look at the way in which 1 and 2 Macc characterize Antiochus as *the blasphemer* (βλάσφημος) and as the one who claimed *equality with the gods* (ἰσόθεα).[759]

We have noted that Antiochus is the chief perpetrator of the atrocities or blasphemies directed against the Temple, Judaism, and the people of Israel, crimes that he committed against other temples and other religions as well.[760] As portrayed by 1 Macc, Antiochus' plans rival those of God Himself in that Antiochus seeks to destroy loyalty and obedience to God. This is particularly evident in his plunder and profanation of the Temple which, for some Jews, would have been perceived as a threat to the cosmic order and to heavenly realities replicated earth. Antiochus' actions are blasphemous, to be sure, but 1 and 2 Macc characterized it as a kind of *arrogant blasphemy* that *contends with God* and even makes *an open claim to deity.*

Although Antiochus is characterized as arrogant in 1 Macc, there is only one direct reference (1 Macc 1:21). In contradistinction, 2 Macc repeatedly makes a point of highlighting Antiochus' *arrogance*[761] and, at one point, calls it *superhuman arrogance*.[762] One account is particularly telling. The narrator of 2 Macc tells us that Antiochus entered the most *holy Temple* (5:15), took *holy vessels* (5:16), and swept away *votive offerings* (5:16) with *profane hands* (5:16). Rather than being filled with awe, Antiochus looted the Temple and was filled with malicious satisfaction (5:17). Later in the narrative, Antiochus is described as "thinking in his arrogance that he could sail on the land and walk on the sea, because his mind was elated" (5:21; NRSV). As Goldstein points out, this is an allusion to Xerxes, "who dared to contend

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[759] Cf. 2 Macc 9:12 and 9:28.

[760] E.g., 1 Macc 1:41; 6:1-4; 2 Macc 9:1-2.

[761] E.g., Antiochus is characterized as *arrogant* (ὑπερηφανία; 2 Macc 5:21; 7:36; 9:7, 8, 11), *haughty* (ὑπερηφάνως; 9:4), *elated in spirit* (ἐμετεωρίζετο τὴν διάνοιαν; 2 Macc 5:17), *elated in vain* (μάτην μετεωρίζου; 2 Macc 7:34), *puffed up* (φρυαττόμενος; 2 Macc 7:34), and *insolent* (ἀγερωχίας; 2 Macc 9:7).

with the gods by bridging the Hellespont and digging a canal through Mount Athos."[763] Like Xerxes, Antiochus is presented as a *theomachos*, someone "who dares to contend with God" and whose punishment was of concern in Greek and Jewish literature.[764] The motif of Antiochus as a *theomachos* runs from 2 Macc 5 to 9. So that readers do not miss this motif, the author has a Jewish martyr, at the moment of death, declare Antiochus guilty of *fighting against God* (θεομαχεῖν; 7:19).

As a *theomachos*, Antiochus contends with God because he perceives himself *to be equal with the gods* (ὄντα ἰσόθεα φρονεῖν; 9:12). The notion of *equality with the gods*[765] should be understood within the broader context of how Emperors and kings were perceived in the A.N.E. For example, it was not uncommon for Roman Emperors and Hellenistic kings to be called *theoi* by their Greek-speaking subjects.[766] Nor was it uncommon to speak of giving the Emperor *isotheoi timai*, "honours equivalent to those paid to the gods."[767] As we have mentioned, Antiochus' claim to divinity and divine honors and his claim to exercise the prerogatives of God were clearly unacceptable to Jewish sensibilities.[768] For the author of 2 Macc, the climax to Antiochus' career of divine presumption and blasphemy reaches a terminal point when God strikes him with a fatal bowel disease (9:5).[769] The narration of Antiochus'

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[762] τὴν ὑπὲρ ἄνθρωπον ἀλαξονείαν; 2 Macc 9:8.

[763] Goldstein (1983) 260.

[764] Aeschylus *Pers.* 820; Aristotle *Rhet.* 1394b; Sophocles *Women of Trachis* 472-73; Antiphanes *Fragment* 289; Gen 3:5; Is 14:12-15; Dan 11:36; Jn 5:18; Phil 2:6; cf. Goldstein (1983) 355, n. 12.

[765] The term ἰσόθεα in 2 Mac 9:12 is the neuter plural accusative of ἰσόθεος, ον. As such, it can be translated *gods*; however, it in a Jewish context, it can be understood as a reference to *God* and is so translated by RSV, NRSV, and NAB.

[766] Price (1984) 81. Although most Roman emperors did not use *theos* of themselves (Gaius was an exception), Greek speaking subjects often referred to the emperor as *theos* and added the term to the list of names usually predicated of an emperor. Price notes that *theos* is a very different term than *divus*. Unlike *theos* the ascription of *divus* to an emperor was controlled by the Romans senate with specific criteria. Thus it was not possible to refer to a living emperor as *divi filius divus* (God, son of God), but Greeks did refer to the living emperor as *theou huios theos*.

[767] Price (1984) 88. With regard to the Roman Emperor, Price states that the predication of the title *theos* located him "in an ambivalent position, higher than mortals but not fully the equal of the gods. The cult he received was described as *isotheoi timai*, and the *eusebeia* which the cult displayed was compatible with honours not fully divine" (94).

[768] E.g., Philo *Mos.* 2.194 is especially critical of the Egyptians for granting *divine honors* (ἰσοθέων τιμῶν) to the things of earth.

[769] There are different traditions regarding the cause of Antiochus IV's death, including mental disease (Polybius XXXI.9 and 1 Macc 6:8-9, 16), physical disease (4QprNab and 2 Macc 9:5-27), and being stoned to death while robbing a temple (2 Macc 11-16); see Mendels (1987) 53-6.

death, which follows, is filled with caustic irony that lampoons his aspirations of divinity. He who tortured others is now tortured himself. (9:6). Claiming to have risen above others, he falls out of his chariot (9:7). Thinking that he had divine power, he is unable to walk (9:8a-b). Imagining that he could touch the stars, he lies flat on his back with no one to carry him because of his stench (9:10). At one point, sarcasm is shot at point blank range when the author states that the immobility of Antiochus *Epiphanes* allowed the power of the *God* to be *manifest*—φανερὰν τοῦ θεοῦ (9:8c).[770] The irony serves to confirm that God is actively defeating Antiochus.[771] Finally, pain and torment overwhelm Antiochus and, in a stunning admission of guilt, he unmasks himself as a divine pretender, saying:

> It is right to be subject to God; mortals should not think that they are equal to God. (2 Macc 9:12b; NRSV)
>
> Δίκαιον ὑποτάσσεσθαι τῷ θεῷ καὶ μὴ θνητὸν ὄντα ἰσόθεα φρονεῖν. (LXX)

Of course, from the position of the author, this is a convenient admission of guilt that only serves to confirm the excessive and presumptuous hubris of Antiochus. We should probably take the reference to *equality*, not as an ontological claim, but as a claim to have *equal of honors of the gods,* like the *isotheoi timai* given to an Emperor. In addition, as Goldstein[772] points out, Antiochus' confession is a version of a well-known maxim in Greek literature that we paraphrase as *human beings should not have divine aspirations.* The maxim is so widely accepted that Aristotle cites it as an example something that needs no proof.[773] Although Aristotle's language is different from 2 Macc, the conceptuality is the same:[774]

> A mortal should have mortal, not immortal thoughts. (*Rhet.* 1394b)
>
> θνατὰ χρὴ τὸν θνατόν, οὐκ ἀθάνατα τὸν θνατὸν φρονεῖν.

We find the same concept in Aeschylus' *Persians* though, again, it is stated differently. Aeschylus accuses Darius of presumptuous pride and impious thoughts because, when he invaded Greece, he was not restrained by religious awe and

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[770] The power of God appears to be manifested by God's enforcement of the *lex talionis* or the law of proportionate justice, the subtext to Antiochus' death in 2 Macc 9:2-12.

[771] Doran (1981) 63 concurs.

[772] Goldstein (1983) 355.

[773] Aristotle *Rhet.* 1394a; maxims are the premises or conclusions of enthymemes and do not need proof.

[774] Aristotle's *Rhet.* 1394b; trans. by Freese (1926); Greek text by Ross (1959).

therefore he "ravaged the images of the gods and set fire to their temples."[775] Darius is condemned because:[776]

> Mortal man should not vaunt himself excessively. (*Pers.* 820)
>
> ὡς οὐχ ὑπέρφευ θνητὸν ὄντα χρὴ φρονεῖν.

In sum, Antiochus is presented as a career blasphemer, a *theomachos*, and a divine pretender. Each of these strands of Antiochus' character portrayal is intertwined and inseparable. In this way, the blasphemy of Antiochus is presented in a unique fashion, a type of blasphemy that (a) contends with God by trampling His people and by stealing from His Temple and (b) attempts to usurp the power, the honor, and even the title of God. It was a type of behavior condemned throughout the ancient world, and even more so in Israel. Regarding such behavior, Philo's comment is *apropos*:

> There are again some who exceed in impiety, not giving the Creator and the creature even equal honor, but assigning to the latter all honor, and respect, and reverence, and to the former nothing at all... [Open display of such impiety is] ... to blaspheme the Deity.[777]

The punishment for such behavior was, as the author of 2 Macc takes ironic joy in depicting, proportionate to the crimes committed. Thus, Antiochus not only receives a divine death sentence, but also *humiliating suffering* equal in magnitude to the *arrogant torment* he inflicted on others.

9.6 Conclusion and Prospects

As with previous texts, a unique *discourse concept* of blasphemy emerges from Maccabean portrayal of Antiochus. There are three elements to that portrayal.

First, Antiochus is accused of *blasphemy against God* for a wide variety of verbal and non-verbal offenses that were directed against His people and His Temple. The offenses perpetrated by Antiochus were labeled *blasphemous* because they were *perceived* to be an affront to God Himself. Second, from the perspective of HP, to say, *"Antiochus blasphemed the Temple," is to say it all.* Because of the symbolism attached to the Temple, when Antiochus profaned the Temple, he blasphemed the Name, threatened the stability of the world, and alerted Israel that divine wrath had

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[775] Aeschylus *Pers.* 810; trans. by Smyth (1926).
[776] Aeschylus *Pers.* 820; trans.and Greek text by Smyth (1926).

come. Third, the author of 2 Macc portrays Antiochus as a *career blasphemer*. His penchant for blasphemy is explained by the fact that he is a *theomachos*, one who dares to contend with God, and that he claimed *equal honors to the gods*. Although the issue of monotheism is not raised directly by 1 or 2 Macc, the attitude of Antiochus probably violated the monotheistic sensitivities of the Jewish people, not because anyone thought that Antiochus was claiming to be a deity in heaven, but because Antiochus claimed the honor that belonged to τὸν θεόν μονόν, *God alone*. Because that dishonors God, it was blasphemy; because it denied the uniqueness of God, it breached monotheistic sensibilities.

When we turn toward FG, a number of alarm bells ring. Like Antiochus, who attempts to suspend the Sabbath and Temple festivals, the Johannine Jesus is accused of changing or violating Sabbath practices (Jn 5:17-18; 7:21-24; 9:14-15).[778] In chapter 13, we ask whether non-believing Jews would have viewed these claims for Jesus as blasphemous. Like Antiochus, Jesus is also accused of divine presumption, because he, being a mortal, "makes himself equal to God" (Jn 5:18). Is it conceivable that Johannine members were themselves charged with blasphemy on the grounds of what is said in Jn 5:18? Like Antiochus, Jesus is perceived as threatening the Temple (Jn 2:13-22; 11:48). In chapter 14, we discuss whether this could have led to a charge of blasphemy against Jesus or the Johannine Christians.

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[777] Philo *Dec.* 62-63; Yonge's trans.
[778] Yee (1989) 31-47.

CHAPTER 10
THE BLASPHEMY OF NICANOR
2 MACCABEES 14:16—15:37

In the previous chapter, we argued that the stories of Antiochus and Nicanor formed part of the shared knowledge of first-century Jews and, as such, they are relevant to our discussion concerning blasphemy an the Johannine community. Since Antiochus was the focus in the previous chapter, Nicanor will occupy our attention in the present one.[779] As before, we will attempt to describe a *discourse concept* of blasphemy, this time in relation to the narrative about Nicanor in 2 Macc 14:16—15:37 with a brief look at the account of Nicanor in 1 Macc 7:33-43. However, before looking at the Nicanor narrative, we will explore the literary context leading up to that account, particularly how the author of 2 Macc (hereafter, the Abridger[780]) fashions a *Temple-propaganda* vis-à-vis blasphemy. [781]

10.1 Temple-Propaganda and Blasphemy

For the Abridger, the status and the fate of the Temple functions as a barometer for the covenantal relationship between the Jews and their God.[782] When the Temple is operating normally and when attempts to pillage it are repulsed, the Jewish people are icons of faithfulness and God's mercy prevails. However, when the Temple is plundered and profaned, the Abridger takes pains to show that Jewish disloyalty is to blame. The theology or ideology is basically Deuteronomic—disobedience leads to cursing, obedience to blessing.[783]

The theme that God protects His Temple is reinforced by the literary structure of 2 Macc. After the two prefixed epistles (1:1—2:18) and a prologue (2:19-32), the

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[779] Although we will concentrate on the account of Nicanor in 2 Macc, we will also refer to the parallel version in 1 Macc (1 Macc 7:26-38 para. 2 Macc 14:15—15:19; 1 Macc 7:39-50 para. 2 Macc 15:20-37).

[780] 2 Macc 2:19-32 states that the author *abridged* the work of Jason of Cyrene; cf. the use of the term in Goldstein (1983) *passim*.

[781] Doran (1981) *passim* characterizes the Abridger's ideology of the Temple as propaganda.

[782] E.g., 2 Macc 5:19-20; 6:12-16.

[783] Cf. 2 Macc 6:12-16 and Deut 28:1-68; so Spilly (1985) 86.

narrative falls into three main parts,[784] each of which advances the Abridger's *temple-propaganda* that show *God protecting the Temple when Jews are faithful.*[785]

> Part 1: The Repulse of Heliodorus (2 Macc 3:1-40)
> Part 2: The Profanation of the Temple and its Renewal (2 Macc 4:1—10:9)
> Part 3: The Defense of the Temple (2 Macc 10:10—15:36)

Part 1 (3:1-40) serves an apologetic function. It begins with the commission of Heliodorus by King Seleucus IV to remove the mass of wealth that had accumulated in the Temple treasury (3:7). With great dramatic style, the Abridger describes how distraught and helpless the Jews feel in resisting Heliodorus. They prostrated themselves before God, praying that He would "keep the deposits safe and secure for those who had placed them in trust."[786] While they are praying, Heliodorus arrives at the Temple treasury and is confronted by a manifestation of God's power. A beautifully adorned horse, with a golden clad rider, appears before his eyes, charges at him, and knocks him down (3:25). Instantly, two splendidly dressed young men appear and flog Heliodorus senseless to the point that he must be carried away on a stretcher (3:26-28). At first, the Jews are speechless, but then break out in praise and rejoicing because *of the manifestation of the Almighty Lord* (τοῦ παντοκράτορος ἐπιφανέντος), who *glorified His own place* (παραδοξάζοντα τὸ ἑαυτοῦ τόπον) (3:30). The narrative ends by reinforcing the temple-propaganda:

> For he who has his dwelling in heaven watches over that place [ἐκείνου τοῦ τόπου] himself and brings it aid, and he strikes and destroys those who come to do it injury (2 Macc 3:39; NRSV).

In contrast with similar stories in the ancient world,[787] the Heliodorus account has a unique literary and social function. It functions as part of the theodicy or apology of 2

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[784] Following Doran (1981) 47-76, who offers, among other things, a defense of the literary unity of each of these sections.

[785] So Doran (1981) 52.

[786] 2 Macc 3:22 (NAB).

[787] As Doran (1981) 47-50 has shown, the account of Heliodorus stands alongside other ancient stories that praise a deity who defends his or her temple or city. Among other things, such stories have functioned to deter marauding armies or to reassure citizens that they had divine protection. Examples include: (a) the inscription from Cos, which describes the repulsion of the Gauls from the Temple at Delphi by Apollo in 279 B.C.E., (b) an inscription from Panamaros about Zeus Panamaros' defense of the city and the literary account of the same action by Pausanias, (c) the Lindos Chronicle's account of Athene's defense of Lindos against Datis, the Persian commander, (d) the account by Syriscus, a local historian of the city of Chersonesus, regarding Athene's defense of that city, (e) Herodotus' account of the intervention of Apollo in defense of Delphi against Persians, (f) the defense of a temple in the

Macc, which defends God's power and God's faithfulness to Israel despite the overwhelming presence of evil. By including the Heliodorus account at the beginning of the book, the Abridger establishes from the outset that *the God of Israel is willing and able to protect the Temple*. So, when the Temple is plundered in Part 2, God is already exonerated, His power and faithfulness is above question, and blame for the presence of evil must lie elsewhere, in this case, with Jewish unfaithfulness.

Part 2 (4:1—10:9) focuses on the profanation of the Temple and its renewal. It begins with two Jewish scoundrels, Jason and Menelaus, who successively acquire the high priesthood through bribery and treachery. When Jason is high priest, Judaism is abandoned and Hellenization is imposed (4:10); but later, when Menelaus assumes the priesthood, evil increases to the point where he perpetrates violence against fellow Jews (4:40-42). When Jason is high priest, there is general neglect of the sacrifices and the Temple (4:11-17); but after Menelaus assumes the high priesthood, the Temple is blatantly robbed (4:32). The portrayal of Jason and Menelaus is one of escalating evil and defection from Judaism. This escalation hits a fevered pitch when Jason tries to take back the priesthood through violence and has his forces attack Menelaus (5:1-10). This motivates Antiochus to come and crush what he thinks is a Jewish revolt. After Antiochus arrives, he slaughters eighty thousand Jews (5:11-14), suppresses Judaism (6:6, 7-11), ransacks the Temple (5:15-21), fills the Temple with debauchery (6:4), defiles the altar (6:5), and calls the Temple "the temple of Olympian Zeus" (6:2). While recounting these atrocities, the Abridger reiterates the apologetic theme: The Lord allowed Antiochus to *profane the Temple* (8:2) and to commit *blasphemies against His name* (8:4), "because of the sins of those who lived in the city.... And what was forsaken [i.e., the Temple] in the wrath of the Almighty was restored again in all its glory when the great Lord became reconciled" (5:17b, 20b; NRSV). But how is the Lord reconciled? As the story continues, the Abridger shows that the Lord is reconciled by Jewish martyrs who, in their steadfast loyalty, suffer and die, which turns God's wrath into mercy (7:37-38; 8:5). Once reconciled, God is called the ally of the Jews (8:24) and they are said to be invulnerable (8:36).

Kedorlaomer inscription, and (g) Yahweh's defense of Jerusalem and its Temple in the account of Sennacherib in 2 Kgs 18:17—19:36 and 2 Chr 32:1-22.

Thereafter, Judas Maccabeus scores one providential victory after another[788] until Antiochus himself miraculously converts to Judaism on his deathbed (9:1-29).[789] Once Antiochus is eliminated, Judas' recovery and rededication of the Temple is uncontested and the first Hanukkah is celebrated (10:1-9).

When we ask how *the blasphemies* of Antiochus (8:4)—which are broadly conceived as assaults on Jews, Judaism, Jerusalem, and the Temple—function within the first two parts, we note that they align with *the motif of God's wrath*, which is understood as God's discipline of the Jews (6:12). In this way, the Abridger presents blasphemy from two different perspectives: From one angle, as we have previously pointed out, blasphemy is *an expression of Antiochus' arrogant self-exaltation*, an attempt to rival God, which leads to the death of Antiochus. But, from another angle, blasphemy is characterized as *an expression of divine discipline*, which leads to life for obedient Jews. That is, the blasphemies of Antiochus (= the atrocities against the Jews) are presented as part of God's wrath and discipline of Israel and, in this way, blasphemy within 2 Macc has a rather ironic *rehabilitative function.*[790]

Part 3 (10:10—15:36) is concerned with showing how God *continues* to provide protection for the Jews and their Temple after the first Hanukkah. Part 3 has two main units. The first unit (10:10—13:26) presents a series of campaigns highlighting how God continues to help the faithful Jews gain victory over their enemies.[791] The narration of each campaign is noticeably condensed. In contrast, the second unit (14:1—15:36) presents one extended narrative, focusing on a single enemy, Nicanor, the general of King Demetrius. The victorious campaigns described in the first unit

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[788] Doran (1981) 56-9 describes 2 Macc 8:1-36 as a skillful literary portrayal of God's help after His wrath is turned to mercy, which leads to the climatic declaration by Nicanor that "the Jews had a Defender and ... the Jews were invulnerable because they followed the laws ordained by him" (8:36).

[789] Doran (1981) 59-60 notes that the "deathbed testament" by Antiochus is a well-known literary device and, while the deathbed letter (9:19-27) should not be taken as authentic, there is evidence that it may have been based on official letters.

[790] To our knowledge, contemporary scholars have not noted this literary function.

[791] The Israelites invoke God's help against the Idumeans (10:14-23), Joppa and Jamnia (12:3-9), Ephron (12:27-28), and Gorgias (12:32-27). During other campaigns, the narrator directly states that God helps Israel defeat the Arabs (12:10-12), Caspin (12:13-16), and Lysias (13:19-17). At other times, heavenly visions accompany Israel as they fight enemies, such as Timothy (10:24-38) and Lysias (11:1-14).

provide miniature versions of the carefully crafted narration of Nicanor's blasphemy and defeat in the second unit. We now turn to that final unit.

10.2 Nicanor Blasphemes the Temple

The last unit of the book (2 Macc 14:1—15:36) focuses on the final and climatic campaign to protect the Temple. It begins with Demetrius hearing an evil report from Alcimus, a corrupt and treasonous Jew, that Judas will never make peace with the Seleucid dynasty. As a result, Demetrius sends Nicanor to destroy Judas' army and to install Alcimus as high priest (14:1-14). Even though Nicanor and Judas end up signing a peace treaty (14:15-25), the power politics of Alcimus force Nicanor to break the treaty and chase Judas into hiding (14:26-30).[792] Although it is unclear where Judas has gone, Nicanor confidently goes directly to the center of Judaism, *the great and holy Temple*, to demand that the priests hand Judas over to him (14:31). When the priests declare that they do not know where Judas is, the Abridger describes Nicanor's reaction in the most remarkable way:

> He stretched out his right hand toward the sanctuary and swore this oath: "If you do not hand Judas over to me as a prisoner, I will level this shrine of God to the ground and tear down the altar, and build here a splendid temple to Dionysus" (2 Macc 14:33; NRSV).
>
> προτείνας τὴν δεξιὰν ἐπὶ τὸν νεὼ ταῦτ' ὤμοσεν ἐὰν μὴ δέσμιόν μοι τὸν Ιουδαν παραδῶτε τόνδε τὸν τοῦ θεοῦ σηκὸν εἰς πεδίον ποιήσω καὶ τὸ θυσιαστήριον κατασκάψω καὶ ἱερὸν ἐνταῦθα τῷ Διονύσῳ ἐπιφανὲς ἀναστήσω (LXX 2 Macc 14:33).

Although Nicanor's threat is never acted on, let alone realized, it is identified as blasphemy[793] and this was enough to place him among the most notorious blasphemers in Jewish history.[794] The Abridger's vivid description of Nicanor shaking his fist and threatening to destroy the Temple and raise another is very

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[792] The account of Alcimus in 2 Macc 14:1-27 is at odds with the parallel account in 1 Macc 7:1-25 in some respects. In 1 Macc, Demetrius made Alcimus high priest and, after gaining some control over Jerusalem, Alcimus requests help from Demetrius to withstand the forces of Judas. Nicanor is then dispatched. In 2 Macc, Nicanor is dispatched to install Alcimus as high priest, but without success. 2 Macc never identifies Alcimus as the high priest because, after the purification of the Temple (2 Macc 10), it would have been contrary to the propaganda of 2 Macc to admit that a defiled high priest, like Alcimus, had again compromised the purity of the Temple.

[793] Nicanor is called a ***blasphemer*** (δύσφηος; 2 Macc 15:32) and his action is described as ***blasphemy*** (δυσφημία; 1 Macc 7:38) and ***speaking evil*** (κακῶς λάλησεν; 1 Macc 7:42).

[794] First, Nicanor's threat is compared with the blasphemy of Sennacherib (1 Macc 7:41; 2 Macc 15:22-24). Second, Jews celebrated victory over Nicanor every year in a festival called "the Day of Nicanor" on the thirteenth of Adar (see Josephus *Ant.* 12.12; *y. Meg.* 1.70c [Neusner 1.4] and *y. Ta'*

similar to other traditions regarding Nicanor.[795] When we turn to the Abridger's description, three phrases stand out.

First, *he stretched out* [προτείνας] *his right hand against the sanctuary* (14:33a). The phrase, προτεινειν την χειρα (*to stretch out the hand*) and similar phrases using τεινειν and ἐκτεινειν, are primarily used in 2 Macc to refer to stretching out hands toward heaven in prayer,[796] but they are also used in the sense of stretching out a hand to take a sword for battle.[797] In 1 Macc, ἐκτεινειν την χειρα (*to stretch out the hand*) is used to refer to striking someone in combat.[798] In addition to combat imagery, *stretching out one's hand* was also a common prophetic gesture, indicating that *something was about to be taken and destroyed*, such as a nation,[799] a city,[800] wicked people,[801] or a temple.[802] Nicanor's fist-waiving gesture was thus a well-known, if not universal, expression of threat or portent of doom. The description of Nicanor is similar to the description of *sinning with a high hand* in Num 15:30-31, which we argued was a defiant, fist-shaking rebellion against God's law and God Himself. In the case of Nicanor, the fist is not waved against God's law, but *against the sanctuary* (ἐπὶ τὸν νεὼ), a threat to destroy *the shrine of God* (τὸν τοῦ θεοῦ σηκὸν). Since it is hard to conceive of a more direct way to threaten transcendent deity than to threaten his or her temple, Jews probably interpreted Nicanor's gesture as a sign of malice against God Himself. And, as we have argued, to express malice toward God is blasphemy (§ 4.4). Thus, aside from whatever Nicanor is reported to have said, *the gesture itself* was blasphemous.[803] It is a clear case of non-verbal blasphemy.

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an. 2.66a [Neusner 2.12]). Third, in Palestinian tradition, Nicanor became a primary example of a blasphemer alongside such notorious figures as Goliath (see *y. Šebu.* 3.34 [Neusner 3.1]).

[795] A comparison of 2 Macc 14:33 with 1 Macc 7:34, 42, and 47 supports Goldstein (1983) 37-41, who argues for a "Common Source" in addition to 1 and 2 Macc. Furthermore, Josephus *Ant.* 12:402-412 account of Nicanor provides some unique details, suggesting yet another source. He includes Nicanor's blasphemy and threat to tear down the Temple, but not the raised fist (12.406).

[796] 2 Mcc 3:20; 7:10; 14:34; 15:12; 15:21; cf.

[797] 2 Macc 15:12, 15.

[798] 1 Macc 6:25; 9:47; 12:42.

[799] Jer 51:25; Ezek 35:3; cf. Exod 7:5, 19; 8:6, 17, etc.

[800] Josh 8:18-19; Jer 6:12; 15:6; 51:25

[801] Ezek 6:14; 14:9,13; 25:7, 13, 16; 35:3; Zeph 1:4; 2:13.

[802] 1 Macc 14:31; 1 Esd 6:32 (Ezra 6:12).

[803] After his death, Nicanor is identified as a *blasphemer* (δύσφημος) and his offending arm (not just his tongue) is cut off; cf. 2 Macc 15:32-33 nad 1 Macc 7:47.

Second, Nicanor vows: *I will make this shrine of God [fall] to the ground* (τὸν τοῦ θεοῦ σηκὸν εἰς πεδίον ποιήσω) (14:33b). Here, Nicanor not only verbally assaults the Temple, but also the *Temple-propaganda* itself. That is, Nicanor assaults the reputation of the Protector of the Temple by suggesting that God is either unwilling or unable to defend the Temple. It is verbal abuse, which is interpreted as blasphemy (cf. 15:32-33). The language of Nicanor's verbal threat is similar to the description of Antiochus' action of trying *to make the holy city level to the ground* (ἁγίαν πόλιν ... ἰσόπεδον ποιῆσαι) (9:14). In addition, Nicanor's vow *to tear down the altar* (τὸ θυσιαστήριον κατασκάψω) (14:33c) recalls Antiochus' *profanation of the altar* (τὸ θυσιαστήριον τοῖς ἀποδιεσταλμένοις) (6:5). By revivifying the memory of the arch-villain, Antiochus, not to mention the Babylonian destruction of the first-temple, the Abridger intensifies the blasphemous threat of Nicanor as part of the climax to his history. But, in contrast with the narrative of Antiochus, there is little mention of suspending Judaism, forsaking the laws, massacring Jews, or burning sacred books. Rather, in the Nicanor-narrative, everything boils down to one main issue, the center of Judaism—the Temple.[804] Thus, in the Abridger's *temple-propaganda*, Nicanor's threat becomes the prime test case for whether God will *protect His Temple* after the first Hanukkah.

Third, Nicanor then adds: *I will raise up here a temple to Dionysus* (ἱερὸν ἐνταῦθα τῷ Διονύσῳ ἐπιφανὲς ἀναστήσω) (14:33d). Nicanor's vow is ambitious. The vow goes beyond the Babylonians, who razed the Temple but did not rebuild another. It is beyond Antiochus, who only renamed the Temple for Olympian Zeus (6:2). Nicanor's ambition is *to raise up* another temple *to replace* the Temple of God. From the Jewish perspective, God had chosen Zion for his place of dwelling[805] and for Nicanor to make such a claim usurps God's exclusive right to Zion. Attempting to usurp the prerogatives of God is contemptuous, to say the least and, as we have previously argued, to display such an attitude is blasphemy.

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[804] Although the issue of the Sabbath is briefly raised in the Nicanor-narrative (15:3-5), concern for the Temple occupies considerably more attention (14:31-36 and 15:6-37).

[805] 1 Macc 7:37; Exod 15:17.

Nicanor's threat to the Temple is thus a frontal attack on the God of the Temple. The priests' reaction to Nicanor is like Hezekiah's reaction to the blasphemy of Sennacherib. The priests enter the sanctuary, stretch out their hands toward heaven, and remind God of His commitments to Israel:

> O Lord ... you were pleased that there should be a temple for your habitation among us [σκηνώσεως ἐν ἡμῖν γενέσθαι] ... keep undefiled forever this house that has been so recently purified. (2 Macc 14:35-36; NRSV).

Later, we will note that the language of God *dwelling among us* (σκηνώσεως ἐν ἡμῖν) in 2 Macc 14:35[806] is very similar to the Johannine theology of the Word *dwelling among us* (ἐσκήνωσεν ἐν ἡμῖν) in Jn 1:14. But for the moment, we wish to point out that even though the usual terms for blasphemy are not present in 2 Macc 14:33-36, the solemnity of the priests' prayer confirms that they are reacting to blasphemy much the same way Hezekiah reacted to Sennacherib. Our reading of 2 Macc is corroborated by the parallel account in 1 Macc 7:33-43.

1 Macc 7:33-43 presents the account of Nicanor with slight, but significant, variation from 2 Macc and highlights Nicanor's blasphemy. In 1 Macc, Nicanor not only threatens to destroy the Temple (7:35), but he also mocks (μυκτηρίζω), derides (γελάω), and defiles (μιαίνω) the priests (7:34). In this way, Nicanor is shown to violate the two-fold prohibition not *to speak evil* (κακῶς λεγεῖν) against God and His leaders (Exod 22:28 [27]). After hearing Nicanor's blasphemy, the priests enter the sanctuary, weep, and plea with God to kill Nicanor and his men for their *blasphemies* (δυσφημιῶν) (7:36-38). This is followed with a prayer by Judas, who reminds God of Sennacherib's blasphemy and then pleads for Nicanor's judgment because he had *spoken wickedly* (κακῶς λαλεῖν) against the sanctuary (7:42). Here, it is worth pointing out that the accusation of *speaking wickedly* (κακῶς λαλεῖν) is identical to the charge against Jesus in the Johannine trial narrative (Jn 18:23), which we will discuss later. As for Nicanor, his demise is predictable. He is killed in battle and his head and right hand, which he shook so defiantly at the Temple, is cut off and *stretched out* (ἐξέτεινεν) for display outside Jerusalem (7:47).

In sum, Nicanor used both gesture and words to threaten the Temple. His expression of abuse and dishonor toward the Temple is blasphemy. We can speak of this as *blasphemy against the Temple*, which it is, but such language can also be understood as *metonymy* for *blasphemy against God Himself.*

10.3 Nicanor Blasphemes the Sabbath

2 Macc also includes a unique and brief account that can be understood as blaspheming the Sabbath. While pursuing Judas with his troops, Nicanor compels certain Jews to accompany him (15:1). However, when he decides to attack on a Sabbath, the Jews who are with him protest and state that he ought to show respect for the day of rest because *the Living Lord Himself, the Sovereign in heaven*, has ordained it (15:4). Nicanor's reply is full of arrogance as he mimics the language of the Jewish protesters, stating, *I am a Sovereign on earth* (15:5).

15:4 When they declared, "It is the living Lord himself, the Sovereign in heaven, who ordered us to observe the seventh day." (NRSV)	15:4 τῶν δ' ἀποφηναμένων ἔστιν ὁ κύριος ζῶν αὐτὸς ἐν οὐρανῷ δυνάστης ὁ κελεύσας ἀσκεῖν τὴν ἑβδομάδα. (LXX)
15:5 he replied, "But I am a sovereign also, on earth, and I command you to take up arms and finish the kings' business." (NRSV).	15:5 ὁ δὲ ἕτερος κἀγώ φησιν δυνάστης ἐπὶ τῆς γῆς ὁ προστάσσων αἴρειν ὅπλα καὶ τὰς βασιλικὰς χρείας ἐπιτελεῖν (LXX).

Nicanor not only contravenes the will of God by forcing Jews to accompany him on the Sabbath but, even more so, flouts God's Sabbath-commandment by issuing his own seventh-day commandment! By defiantly rejecting and then contradicting the Sabbath-commandment, Nicanor *sins with a high hand* (Num 15:30-31), which we argued was blasphemy against God (§ 7.1).

In addition, when Nicanor designates himself as *sovereign on earth*, he presents himself as *the other* (ὁ δὲ ἕτερος; 15:5), the one who stands over against the *Sovereign in heaven.* It is as if he is announcing, "You have heard it said, keep the Sabbath; but I say to you, let the ruler of heaven keep to heaven, I am ruler on earth."

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[806] One slight and insignificant variation—κατασκήνωσεως ἐν ἡμῖν (*dwelling among us*)—occurs in 2 Macc 14:35 and is witnessed by a group late minuscules (*L'* 58 311) that may represent an earlier Lucianic recension.

In this way, the Abridger describes Nicanor as casting himself as the god of earth, limiting God to heaven, and thus recapitulating the blasphemy of Antiochus in his claim to divinity (2 Macc 9:12, 28; cf. § 9.5). By limiting God's authority to heaven, Nicanor is also implying a type of cosmic duality where there is a sharp cleavage between heavenly and earthly authority. Of course, Nicanor's cosmic duality violates Jewish monotheistic sensitivities, which has a unitive view of heaven and earth with One Sovereign over both.[807]

So, on the one hand, we have described this as blaspheming the Sabbath, which it is because Nicanor denigrates the honored Sabbath. On the other hand, to speak of *blaspheming the Sabbath* is *metonymy* for *blaspheming the Lord of the Sabbath*, which the rest of our brief analysis has attempted to point out. Nicanor dishonors and is contemptuous of the Sabbath and, for that reason, he dishonors and is contemptuous of God, and that is blasphemy (§ 4.4).

10.4 Nicanor's Defeat and Death

Lastly, we look at look at the outcome of Nicanor's blasphemy, which highlights the verbal and non-verbal aspects of his blasphemy and is an application of the *lex talionis* or the law of proportionate justice. Like the account in 1 Macc, when Judas defeats Nicanor and his army in battle, the head and right arm of Nicanor is cut off and taken back to Jerusalem (2 Macc 15:30). Then, in accord with the Abridger's *Temple-propaganda*, Judas is described as graphically verifying that God keeps his Temple from defilement (cf. 15:34b).

> He showed them the vile Nicanor's head and the wretched blasphemer's arm that had been boastfully stretched out against the holy dwelling of the Almighty. He cut out the tongue of the ungodly Nicanor, saying he would feed it piecemeal to the birds ... (2 Macc 15:32-33a; NAB).
>
> καὶ ἐπιδειξάμενος τὴν τοῦ μιαροῦ Νικάνορος κεφαλὴν καὶ τὴν χεῖρα τοῦ δυσφήμου ἣν ἐκτείνας ἐπὶ τὸν ἅγιον τοῦ παντοκράτορος οἶκον ἐμεγαλαύχησεν. καὶ τὴν γλῶσσαν τοῦ δυσσεβοῦς Νικάνορος ἐκτεμὼν ἔφη κατὰ μέρος δώσειν τοῖς ὀρνέοις ... (LXX 2 Macc 15:32).

[807] N.T. Wright (1992) 252-59 analyzes Jewish monotheism in terms of ten dualities, some of which are compatible with Jewish monotheism and some that are not. According to Wright, *cosmological duality* is not compatible with Jewish monotheism (253) and therefore Nicanor's claim (for cosmological duality) violates Jewish monotheism.

Certainly, the Abridger could have narrated the death of Nicanor without including the gruesome details about his severed head, arm, and tongue. However, the dismemberment is mentioned three times in a very short space, indicating some significance (15:30, 32-33, 35). It is likely that, in accord with the *lex talionis*, the offensive organs—the tongue that wagged and the fist that shook—are shown to have been dealt with, never to blaspheme again. As we suggested earlier, by highlighting the tongue and fist of Nicanor, the Abridger also highlights the verbal and non-verbal instrumentality of blasphemy.

10.5 Conclusion and Prospects

The Nicanor narrative provides a unique *discourse concept* of blasphemy that may provide an important perspective for understanding the theology of FG and its possible offense that theology may have caused non-believing Jews.

2 Macc has highlighted the importance and centrality of the Temple for early Judaism. According to the Abridger, God takes great concern for the Temple and, so long as Jews are faithful to the covenant, God protects it from all harm and defilement. However, as implied in the Temple-propaganda, unfaithful Jews are particularly dangerous in that they invite divine wrath and open the possibility that God will allow atrocities and blasphemies to be committed. The mere appearance of blasphemy is both a sign of Jewish disloyalty and a sign of God's rehabilitative wrath. After the blasphemies of Antiochus and the rededication of the Temple, 2 Macc demonstrates that Israel remains faithful to God and so God *continues* to protect the Temple. For the Abridger, Nicanor provides the ultimate test case regarding whether God would protect His Temple when Jews remain faithful to the covenant.

As we saw, Nicanor verbally and non-verbally threatened to destroy the Temple and thereby challenged the reputation and honor of God as the Protector of the Temple. Such action was interpreted as blasphemy. Furthermore, in claiming that he would raise a new temple for Dionysus, he contemptuously arrogated for himself the prerogatives of God. Again, this is blasphemy. Moreover, Nicanor dishonored (blasphemed) the Sabbath and the God of the Sabbath; first, by contradicting the

Sabbath-commandment and, second, by claiming that he, not God, was a ruler on earth. In sum, Nicanor's blasphemy can be characterized as contemptuous and disparaging of God, the Protector of the Temple and Lord of the Sabbath.

When we turn to FG, a number of parallels are suggested. First, like Nicanor, Jesus *appears* to challenge the sovereignty of God regarding the Sabbath-commandment (Jn 5:2-18) and, in response to questioning, suggest that there are two sovereigns, God the Father and himself (Jn 5:17, 19-30). Could non-believing Jews have viewed this as blaspheming the Lord of the Sabbath? This is addressed in chapter 13. Second, like Nicanor, Jesus made threatening gestures toward the Temple (Jn 2:13-16) and, in the same context, verbalized its doom (Jn 2:19). Could non-believing Jews have understood Jesus as blaspheming the Temple? Similarly, in the so-called Jewish trial narrative in FG, Jesus is portrayed as defending the charge that he had *spoken wickedly* (κακῶς λαλεῖν; Jn 18:23), the very accusation that was brought against Nicanor for his blasphemy of the Temple (1 Macc 7:42). Could the use of *speaking evil* in Jn 18:23 have been alluding to Jesus blaspheming the Temple? We will look at this in chapter 14.

CHAPTER 11
THE BLASPHEMY OF AN EGYPTIAN RULER
PHILO'S *DE SOMNIIS* 2.123-132

In chapters 5 to 10, we looked at various discourse concepts of blasphemy as they emerged from selected Jewish texts, texts that were widely known in early Judaism, probably influencing or reflecting the shared knowledge of first-century Jews. It is not surprising, therefore, that Philo (20 BCE – 50 CE) not only knew, but also very familiar with all three of the Mosaic texts that we have examined.[808] In this chapter, we look at Philo's understanding of blasphemy and, in particular, his description of the blasphemy of an Egyptian ruler in *Somn.* 2.123-132. Although Philo mentions blasphemy in number of different texts,[809] we will look at *Fug.* 84, *Mos.* 2.205-206, and *Decal.* 61-69 before concentrating on *Somn.* 2.123-132. In contrast with previous chapters, we will not seek a literary discourse concept of blasphemy, since we are dealing with multiple treatises and not one discourse. However, broadly conceived, we are seeking a discourse concept of blasphemy insofar as Philo's thoughts about blasphemy form a unified discourse within a single mind.

11.1 *Fug.* 84

As part of a larger group of works dedicated to the allegorical interpretation of Genesis,[810] *De fuga et inventione* (*On Flight and Finding*) presents an exposition of each verse of Gen 16:6-12 (omitting v. 10), which concerns Hagar's flight. Here we will briefly trace part of Philo's thought, which leads from talking about cities of refuge to blasphemy of God.

Philo argues that God mercifully provides cities of refuge for unintentional murderers (*Fug.* 53), because God ordains unintentional sins (*Fug.* 76). In contrast, whoever

[808] *QE* 2.5 comments on LXX Exod 22:27 and Philo alludes to it in *Spec.* 1.53, *Fug.* 84 (cf. chapter 5). Philo comments on Lev 24:10-23 in *Mos.* 2.205-8 (cf. chapter 6). Philo's knowledge of Num 15:30-36 is reflected in *Spec.* 1.265, *Spec* 2.64, *Mig* 91, and *Virt.* 171-174 (cf. chapter 7).

[809] Philo uses a range of terms for *blasphemy*, including βλασφημέω (10 times), βλασφημία 11 times), βλάσφημος (twice), δυσφημέω (once), καταλαλέω (5 times), λοιδορέω (4 times), and λοιδορία (4 times). Cf. *Philo's Index* by Borgen, Fuglseth, and Skarsten (2000).

commits intentional murder is responsible for his sin and cannot say God ordained it (*Fug.* 79). Philo contends that there is no refuge for intentional murderers (*Fug.* 81) and, if such a person tries to seek refuge, it is tantamount to blaming God for his sin (*Fug.* 80). Anyone who blames God deserves punishment and, Philo asserts, Exod 21:15 indicates the type of penalty required: Whoever falsely accuses or *speaks against* (κακολογέω) father or mother should be put to death (*Fug.* 83). Philo believes that, in this way, Moses proclaims the death penalty for those who speak against God:

> He as good as proclaims in a loud voice that no pardon must be granted to a blasphemer against God (*Fug.* 84; Loeb).
>
> μονονοὺ γὰρ βοᾷ καὶ κέκραγεν, ὅτι τῶν εἰς τὸ θεῖον βλασφημούντων οὐδενὶ συγγνώμης μεταδοτέον (Φυγης 84; Loeb).

Philo's argument is that individuals, who blame God for the evil they intentionally commit, blaspheme God and should be executed. It is a *Qal wa-homer* (lit. *light and heavy*) argument[811]; that is, if *speaking against* (κακολογέω) parents requires the death penalty (*Fug.* 83), then surely in the more important case of *speaking against* (βλασφημέω) God, execution must be exacted (*Fug.* 84).

On the surface, therefore, *Fug.* 84 concerns intentional murderers who claim to deserve a place of refuge. Intentional murders do not deserve refuge and, if they claim refuge, it is to attribute evil to God, which is blasphemy. For such, there is no pardon. Underlying the discussion, however, the issue seems to concern misrepresenting God or lying about God. That, too, would be blasphemy.

11.2 *Mos.* 2.203-208

De vita Mosis 2 (*On the Life of Moses 2*) treats the character of Moses as legislator (2.1-66), priest (2.67-186), and prophet (2.187-287). In the last part, Philo offers four examples of Moses' prophetic function. One of the examples focuses on blasphemy and, in particular, Moses prophetic judgment regarding the Egyptian-Hebrew offender mentioned in Lev 24:10-23 (2.192-208). There are at least three aspects of Philo's exposition that provide a window to his perspective on blasphemy.

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[810] Borgen (1984) 243-4.

[811] Bock (1998) 62 states that it is a "classic lesser to greater argument."

First, Philo's commentary on Lev 24:10-23 provides an underlying cause for the blasphemy when he describes the Egyptian heritage of the offender (2.193-195). The offender not only set aside the Jewish customs of his mother, but he embraced the customs of the Egyptians, whom Philo characterizes as having *set up earth as a power to challenge heaven* (γῆν ἐπετείχισαν οὐρανῷ) and as having given earth *honor equal to gods* (ἰσοθέων τιμῶν) (2.194). The offender is portrayed as so thoroughly influenced by *Egyptian atheism* (Αἰγυπτιακῆς ἀθεότητος) that, when he quarrels with a Jew, he freely and wickedly *curses* (καταράομαι) the God of Israel (2.196). In this way, a picture is painted of a man who, fueled by Egyptian idolatry, *refuses to reverence God* (μή σέβειν θεὸν) and therefore blasphemes God (2.198).

Second, Philo's commentary on Lev 24:10-23 makes a distinction between two types of verbal offense.[812] After noting the imprisonment of the Egyptian-Hebrew, Philo states that Moses promulgated a two-pronged law:

> Whoever curses god, let him bear the guilt of his sin, but he that nameth the name of the Lord let him die (*Mos.* 2.203; Loeb).
>
> ὃς ἂν καταράσηται θεόν, ἁμαρτίας ἔνοχος ἔστω, ὃς δ' ἂν ὀνομάσῃ τὸ ὄνομα κυρίου, θνησκέω (*Mos.* 2.203; Loeb).[813]

Philo contends that *cursing* (καταράομαι) is forbidden, but it is a lesser crime than *vocalizing* or *naming the Name* (ὀνομάσῃ τὸ ὄνομα), which is punishable by death (2.204). Philo then argues that Moses' use of the term *god* did not refer to God, but so-called gods (2.205). Admittedly, this is an unexpected twist, since the Egyptian-Hebrew man cursed the God of Israel, not a so-called god (cf. 2.196). Nevertheless, Philo insists that Lev 24:16 prohibits insulting (βλασφημίας) false gods, because it teaches Jews reverence for the name or title of "god" and thus God Himself (2.205). This line of reasoning is evident elsewhere in Philo (*Spec.* 1.53) as well as in Josephus (*Ant.* 4.207), so it is likely that Philo is expressing a Jewish perspective that is not simply his own. Philo argues by analogy that just as we do not call our parents by their personal names out of honor for them, so we should not use the divine Name (2.207). Thus, it is simply unpardonable to use recklessly or unseasonably the divine

[812] Cf. the discussion in Goldenberg (1997) 67-8; Bock (1998) 63-4.

Name (2.208).[814] In another treatise, Philo refers to the Name as that "which only those whose ears and tongues are purified may hear or speak in the holy place, and no other person, nor in any other place at all" (Loeb; *Mos.* 2.114). By inference, using the Name outside the Temple or by a person not properly purified would count as *unseasonable* use of the Name and therefore blasphemous.

Third, while discussing the meaning of *naming the name*, Philo also mentions a third type of verbal offense:[815]

> But if anyone, I will not say blasphemes the Lord of gods and men, but even ventures to utter His name unseasonably, let him suffer the penalty of death. (*Mos.* 2.206; Loeb).
>
> εἰ δέ τις οὐ λέγω βλασφημήσειεν εἰς τὸν ἀνθρώπων καὶ θεῶν κύριον, ἀλλὰ καὶ τολμήσειεν ἀκαίρως αὐτοῦ φθέγξασθαι τοὔνομα, θάνατον ὑπομεινάτω τὴν δίκην. (*Mos.* 2.206; Loeb).

Although Philo is expanding on what *naming the Name* means, one can see in the quotation above that, in a very cautious way, Philo alludes to *blaspheming the God of Israel*, which is a worse than *naming the Name.* In this way, Philo indicates a third verbal offense to add to the previous two. What that blasphemy entailed, Philo does not say in this context.

The result is a three-tiered scheme of verbal offense:[816] (1) *Cursing a god* is a high crime, it is classified as blasphemy, and it is forbidden because it can lead to irreverence for the One who is properly called "god". (2) *Vocalizing the Name* is a higher crime, it is unpardonable, and it demands the death sentence. Whether Philo classifies this offense as blasphemy is unclear. (3) *Blaspheming the God of Israel*, nearly unthinkable for Philo, is the highest crime and, as he states elsewhere,

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[813] Follows LXX Lev 24:15a-16b; see our discussion in chapter 6.

[814] According to Wolfson (1948) 121-22, *the most holy name of God*, mentioned in *Mos.* 2.208, refers to the name YHVH, which Philo describes as the *quadriliteral* (τετραγράμματον) name (*Mos.* 2.115, 132) or the *proper name* (κύριον ὄνομα) (*Mut.* 2, 11, 13; *Somn.* 1.39, 230) and distinguishes it from the *many other forms of the name* (πολυώνυμον ὄνομα) of God (*Decal.* 19, 94). The name was not to be vocalized except by the high priest in the temple (*Sifre Num.* § 39; *m. Sotah.* 7.6; *m. Tamid.* 7.2).

[815] See Wolfson (1948) 121-24, who treats Philo's exposition on blasphemy and naming the Name as part of his argument that "the principle of the unnamability of God ... was taken by Philo to imply that God is incomprehensible" (123-24).

[816] To our knowledge, contemporary scholars have not observed this three-tiered scheme.

demands the utmost penalty without delay, without jury, and without mercy (*Spec.* 54-55).

11.3 *Decal.* 61-65

De decalogo (*On the Decalogue*) is a treatise on the theophany on Sinai and an exposition of the Ten Commandments. The treatise has four main sections dealing with questions about the Sinai-theophany (*Decal.* 1-49), the first five commandments (50-120), the second five commandments (121-153), and a synopsis of Mosaic legislation (154-178). Our focus is on Philo's exposition of the first commandment (52-65), which has a sharp, polemical tone directed against those who give honor and glory to the created order rather than to the Creator. Since *Decal.* 61-65 is very significant for our purposes, it warrants substantial quotation:

(61) So just as anyone who rendered to the subordinate satraps the honours due to the Great King would have seemed to reach the height not only of unwisdom but of foolhardiness, by bestowing on servants what belonged to their master, in the same way anyone who pays the same tribute to the creatures as to their Maker may be assured that he is the most senseless and unjust of men in that he gives equal measure to those who are not equal, though he does not thereby honour the meaner many but deposes the one superior.

(61) καθάπερ οὖν τοῦ μεγάλου βασιλέως τὰς τιμὰς εἴ τις τοῖς ὑπάρχοις σατράπαις ἀπένειμεν, ἔδοξεν ἂν οὐκ ἀγνωμονέστατος μόνον ἀλλὰ καὶ ῥιψοκινδυνότατος εἶναι χαριζόμενος τὰ δεσπότου δούλοις, τὸν αὐτὸν τρόπον [ἂν] τοῖς αὐτοῖς εἴ τις γεραίρει τὸ πεποιηκότα τοῖς γεγονόσιν, ἵστω πάντων ἀβουλότατος ὢν καὶ ἀδικότατος, ἴσα διδοὺς ἀνίσοις οὐκ ἐπὶ τιμῇ τῶν ταπεινοτέρων ἀλλ' ἐπὶ καθαιρέσει τοῦ κρείττονος.

(62) And there are some who in a further excess of impiety do not even give this [*i.e., the Creator and the creature*][817] equal payment, but bestow on those others all that can tend to honour, while to Him they refuse even to the commonest of all tributes, that of remembering Him.

(62) εἰσὶ δ' οἳ καὶ προσυπερβάλλουσιν ἀσεβείᾳ μηδὲ τὸ ἴσον ἀποδιδόντες, ἀλλὰ τοῖς μὲν τὰ πάντα τῶν ἐπὶ τιμῇ χαριζόμενοι, τῷ δ' οὐδὲν νέμοντες ἀλλ' οὐδὲ μνήμην, τὸ κοινότατον.

(63) Some again, seized with a loud-mouthed frenzy, publish abroad samples of their deep-seated impiety and attempt to blaspheme the Godhead, and when they whet the edge of their evil-speaking tongue they do so in the wish to grieve the pious ...

(63) ἔνιοι δὲ καὶ στομάργῳ κατεχόμενοι λύττῃ τὰ δείγματα τῆς ἐνιδρυμένης ἀσεβείας εἰς μέσον προφέροντες βλασφημεῖν ἐπιχειροῦσι τὸ θεῖον, ἀκονησάμενοι κακήγορον γλῶτταν, ἅμα καὶ λυπεῖν ἐθέλοντες τοὺς εὐσεβοῦντας ...

[817] Following the translation by Yonge (1993 [1854]) 523, we have added the phrase *the Creator and the creature* in brackets, because it is not in the Loeb translation or in the Greek; however, it is the implied referent of *this*.

(64) Let us then reject all such imposture and refrain from worshipping those who by nature are our brothers[818] ...	(64) πᾶσαν οὖν τὴν τοιαύτην τερθρείαν ἀπωσάμενοι τοὺς ἀδελφοὺς φύσει μὴ προσκυνῶμεν ...
(65) Let us, then engrave deep in our hearts this as the first and most sacred of commandments, to acknowledge and honour one God Who is above all... (Loeb).	(65) πρῶτον μὲν οὖν παράγγελμα καὶ παραγγελμάτων ἱερώτατον στηλιτεύσωμεν ἐν ἑαυτοῖς, ἕνα τὸν ἀνωτάτω νομίζειν τε καὶ τιμᾶν θεόν (Loeb).

The underlined text focuses our three comments. First, the issue of *honor* binds the passage together. Reference to *honor* (τὰς τιμὰς) begins the passage in 61 and reference to *honor* (τιμᾶν) ends the passage in 65. In between, *honor* (τιμῇ) is mentioned twice, once at the end of 61 and once in 62. Other *honor-like* language is also used, including *worship* (προσκυνῶμεν) in 64 and *giving equal [payment or honor]* (τὸ ἴσον ἀποδιδόντες) in 62. The concepts of being *equal* (ἴσα in 61 and ἴσον in 62) and *unequal* (ἀνίσοις in 61) also bind the passage. Put together, Philo is arguing that Creator and creature should not be honored equally, but unequally, because the Creator and creature are not on equal levels; rather, *one God is above all* (ἕνα τόν ἀνωτάτω ...θεόν).

Second, Philo mentions that certain individuals make an *open display* or *publish abroad* (προφέποντες) their impiety and attempt *to blaspheme the Godhead* (βλασφημεῖν ἐπιχειροῦσι τὸ θεῖον) (63). Other than saying that it entails *public display* (προφέποντες) and involves an *evil-speaking tongue* (κακήγορον γλῶτταν), Philo does not describe what blasphemy entails, what was said or how it was said. However, the context suggests that to blasphemy is *to dishonor* God in some fashion, probably by giving human rulers (indicated by 61) or celestial bodies (indicted by 66) honor equal to God Himself. In this context, blasphemy is not a direct verbal assault on or defamation of God, but idolatry, *stealing God's honor and giving it to human leaders or objects of pagan worship*. Here, blasphemy and idolatry kiss.[819]

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[818] *Decal.* 64 indicates that *brothers* refers to *created things* (τὰ γενόμενα); Colson (1937) 38-39 states that *brothers* refer to *the heavenly bodies* (citing *De Gig.* 8) and not *angels*.

[819] As Bock (1998) 67 observes, "The linkage of blasphemy and idolatry is something that will frequently occur in the rabbinical material." For example, see *y. Sanh.* 7:25a-b [Neusner 7:8-9] and the comments by Bock (1998) 93-95. Strack-Billerbeck (1922) 1.1010 argue that both the blasphemer and the idolater are viewed as rejecting the entire law, both are stoned to death, and both are then hung

Third, Bock's statement, that "Philo is appealing to his audience not to worship rulers, who claim to be like God,"[820] is slightly misleading. The issue is not primarily about claiming to be like God but, more narrowly, giving and receiving honor that properly belongs to God. Thus, Philo is appealing to his audience *to honor the Creator* and *not to honor those who claim the glory that belongs to God alone.*

11.4 *Somn.* 2.123-132

Although Philo wrote three treatises on the nature of dreams, only two survive, *De somniis 1 and 2* (*On Dreams 1 and 2*). In *Somn. 2*, Philo interprets six dreams from Genesis.[821] Our focus is on the second dream of Joseph (2.110-154). In this treatise of Philo, Joseph represents human arrogance and vanity.[822] At one point, Joseph is even rebuked by his father for dreaming that the heavenly bodies would give him *worship* (προσεκύνουν) (2.111). The dream is a warning for all those who exalt themselves over other people and over nature itself (2.115). Philo then provides three examples of people, like Joseph, who foolishly exalt themselves over nature itself.

First, Philo points to Xerxes, who tried to change the course of nature by putting a canal through Mount Athos and who attacked heaven by shooting arrows at the sun (2.117-20). Second, Philo cites the Germans, who tried to repel floodwaters with their swords and thus, he says, deserve ridicule for attempting the truly impossible (2.121-22). Third, in the most foolish exhibition of human arrogance, an unnamed ruler of Egypt[823] tried to do away with the Sabbath (2.123-32). The account of the Egyptian leader concerns us and bears extended quotation:

> (2.123) Not long ago I knew one of the ruling class who when he had Egypt in his
>
> (2.123) δ' οὐ πρώην ἄνδρα τινὰ οἶδα τῶν ἡγεμονικῶν, ὅς, ἐπειδὴ τὴν

(*m. Sanh* 6.4; *y. Sanh.* 6.23c, 19). What can be said of one can be said of the other (*Sifré Deut.* 21.22; *Sifré Num* 15.31; *y. Sanh.* 7.25b, 9).

[820] Bock (1998) 65.

[821] Two dreams by Joseph (2.1-154), one dream by the chief baker and another by the chief butler (2.155-214), and finally two more by Pharaoh (2.215-302).

[822] So Colson (1938) 436; see also Kraft (1991) 136-8.

[823] We have called the ruler an Egyptian; however it is possible that the ruler was in fact of Jewish origin. Kraft (1991) 135, 138-141 argues that the ruler was Philo's own nephew, Tiberius Julius Alexander, who became prefect of Egypt in the late 60s. Others have argued that the ruler was Flaccus (so Mangey), or a "coded reference" to the Romans (so Goodenough), or the Flaccus' two predecessors, Iberus or Vitrasius Pollio (so Colson). Although there is little agreement about who was the leader, commentators agree that the unnamed ruler was a real person.

charge and under his authority purposed to disturb our ancestral customs and especially to do away with the law of the Seventh Day which we regard with most reverence and awe. He tried to compel men to do service to him on it and perform other actions which contravene our established custom, thinking that if he could destroy the ancestral rule of the Sabbath it would lead the way to irregularity in all other matters, and a general backsliding (Loeb).

προστασίαν καὶ ἐπιμέλειαν εἶχεν Αἰγύπτου, τὰ πάτρια κινεῖν ἡμῶν διενοήθη καὶ διαφερόντως τὸν ἁγιώτατον καὶ φρικωδέστατον περὶ τῆς ἑβδόμης ὑπάρχοντα νόμον καταλύειν καὶ ὑπηρετεῖν ἠνάγκαζεν [ἐν αὐτῇ] αὐτῷ καὶ τὰ ἄλλα ποιεῖν παρὰ τὸ καθεστὼς ἔθος, νομίζων ἀρχὴν ἔσεσθαι καὶ τῆς περὶ τὰ ἄλλα ἐκδιαιτήσεως καὶ τῆς τῶν ὅλων παραβάσεως, εἰ τὸ ἐπὶ τῇ ἑβδόμῃ πάτριον ἀνελεῖν δυνηθείη. (Loeb).

Philo goes on to describe how the Jews refused to submit to such demands (2.124) and how their refusal evoked an ominous speech from the Egyptian ruler who, in essence, said, "Suppose you were attacked, or suppose a flood, fire, terrible storm, famine, plague, or earthquake came. Would you not get up and protect yourselves, even on the Sabbath?" (2.125-128). After setting up his Jewish opponents with such rhetorical jabs, the ruler finished his speech with a knockout blow:

(2.129) "See then," he went on, "I who stand before you am all the things I have named. I am the whirlwind, the war, the deluge, the lightning, the plague of famine or disease, the earthquake which shakes and confounds what was firm and stable..." (Loeb).

(2.129) καὶ μὴν οὗτος αὐτὸς ἐγὼ τὰ λεχηέντα, ἔφη, πάντα εἰμί, τυφώς, πόλεμος, κατακλυσμός, κεραυνός, λιμηρὰ καὶ λοιμέδης νόσος, ὁ τινάττων καὶ κυκῶν τὰ παγίως ἑστῶτα σεισμός ... (Loeb).

The logic of the Egyptian was clear, the Sabbath could be suspended for natural disasters or acts of God; equally evident was the hubris of the Egyptian, who declared that he himself was just such an extraordinary act of God. In response, Philo is incensed and accuses the ruler of a series of atrocious impieties:

(2.130) What shall we say of one who says or even merely thinks these things? Shall we not call him an evil thing hitherto unknown: a creature of a strange land or rather one from beyond the ocean and the universe—he who dared to liken to the All-blessed his all-miserable self?

(2.130) τί οὖν τὸν ταῦτα λέγοντα ἢ διάοούμενον αὐτὸ μόνον εἶναι φῶμεν; ἆρ' οὐκ ἐκτόποιν; ὑπερωκεάνιον μὲν οὖν ἢ μετακόσμιόν τι καινὸν κακόν, εἴ γε τῷ πάντα μακαρίῳ ὁ πάντα βαρυδαίμων ἑαυτὸν ἐξομοιοῦν ἐτόλμησεν.

(2.131) Would he delay to utter blasphemies against the sun, moon, and other stars ...?

(2.131) ὑπερθεῖτ' ἂν οὗτος ἥλιον καὶ σελήνην καὶ τοὺς ἄλλους ἀστέρας βλασφημεῖν ... ;

(2.132) Nay ... [*he would*] accuse the stars of not paying their regular tribute, and scarce refrain from demanding the honour and homage be paid by the things

(2.132) ... ὥσπερ τὸν εἰωθότα δασμὸν οὐκ ἐνεγκόντας τοὺς ἀστέρας αἰτιάσεται, τιμᾶσθαι μονονοὺ καὶ προσκυνεῖσθαι δικαιῶν ὑπὸ τῶν

of heaven to the things of earth, and to himself more abundantly inasmuch as being a man he conceives himself to have been made superior to other living creatures. (Loeb).	οὐρανίων τἀπίγεια καὶ περιττότερον ἑαυτόν, ὅσῳ καὶ τῶν ἄλλων ἄνθρωπος ὢν διενηνοχέναι ζῴων δοκεῖ. (Loeb).

Regarding this series of atrocious impieties, we have five comments. First, as Kraft has argued, Philo is speaking about a *real person* of authority in Egypt, someone that Philo personally knew in his recent past, and thus the example refers to *real events* (2.123).[824] The ruler was probably a Roman prefect of Egypt, *he had Egypt in his charge and under his authority* (τὴν προστασίαν καὶ ἐπιμέλειαν εἶχεν Αἰγύπτου).[825] This ruler tried to force Jews to abandon Sabbath practices and, through it, to change Jewish law and practice as a whole. The situation was serious and, while the provocation for the crisis is not clear, the issue was work related, thus concern for local productivity or regional commerce may have been the catalyst.

Second, the Egyptian ruler apparently dared to compare himself with the destructive powers of nature—*I am the whirlwind, the flood, and the earthquake* (2.129). At first blush, this sounds pompous and unrealistic. However, when we consider that the ruler was trying to motivate the Jews to work on the Sabbath with threats, which had yet to become violent, it is possible that such language was used. He apparently knew Jewish custom and he knew that under extraordinary circumstances the Jews would not sit unmoved on the Sabbath.[826] The ruler took that knowledge and told the Jews that they should consider themselves threatened by such extraordinary circumstances, namely himself, his authority and his military power. Animated by some degree of arrogance, the ruler used hyperbole to express the threat—*I am the whirlwind* and so on (2.129). No doubt Philo put the threat into its current literary form to highlight its blasphemous implications, but we can sense that behind Philo's redaction is a very real and ominous warning of a ruler exasperated by Jewish non-compliance.

[824] Kraft (1991) 134.
[825] So Goodenough (1938) 29.
[826] E.g., 1 Macc 2:41.

Third, Philo draws out the implications of the ruler's warning—*as if possible, he dared to compare his all-miserable self to the All-Blessed* (2.130).[827] Philo is trying to mobilize Jewish resistance against the ruler by showing that his hubris threatens, as if possible, the very source of creation itself, namely, God Himself. The operative phrase is *he dared to compare himself* (ἑαυτὸν ἐξομοιοῦν ἐτόλμησεν). The infinitive, ἐξομοιοῦν, means *to make quite like* or *to assimilate.*[828] The conceptuality is similar to *Decal.* 61-65, where Philo implies that it is blasphemous to give equal (ἴσος) honor and worship to creature and Creator alike, and *Leg.* 1.49, where Philo states that *the selfish and atheistic mind supposes it is equal with God.*[829] Sennacherib, Antiochus Epiphanes, Nicanor, and other characters that compared themselves with God, also come to mind.

Fourth, Philo states that the Egyptian ruler would *blaspheme* (βλασφημέω) the sun, moon, and stars (2.131). Although he does not directly say that the ruler blasphemes God, we should understand it that way, since the blasphemous attitude is directed toward heavenly realities that, in the ancient world, would include God Himself.

Fifth, according to Philo's interpretation (2.132), the blasphemy of the Egyptian ruler was two-fold. On the one hand, he audaciously expected heavenly realities to *honor and worship him* (τιμᾶσθαι ... καὶ προσκυνεῖσθαι ... ἑαυτόν). On the other, he egotistically confused his creaturely status with that of the Creator since, *being a man* (ἄνθρωπος ὤν), he conceived himself *to have been made above* (διενηνοχέναι[830]) other living creatures. In this regard, Goodenough's comment on *Somn.* 2.95ff is equally apropos here: "To God should be given the real prostrating (προσκύνησις) and honor (τιμὴ), and if any ruler takes to himself the 'honor' of God and calls upon

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[827] Our translation of εἴ γε τῷ πάντα μακαρίῳ ὁ πάντα βαρυδαίμων ἑαυτὸν ἐξομοιοῦν ἐτόλμησεν, taking the εἴ with the aorist ἐτόλμησεν as an expression of impossibility, *as if possible ... he dared*; see Liddell and Scott (1889) 226.

[828] Liddell and Scott (1889) 275.

[829] Φιλαυτος δὲ καὶ ἄθεος ὁ νοῦς οἰόμενος ἰσος εἶναι θεῷ (*Leg.* 1.49a).

[830] Perf. pass. inf. of διαφέρω, a term that can express *superior value* and has a paradigmatic relationship with such terms as τίμιος (*being of considerable value*), δοχάζομαι (*to be of exceptional value*), ὑψηλός (*very valuable, of exceptional value*); see *Domain 65* in Louw and Nida (1989).

his subjects to a cult of himself personally (πρὸς τὴ ἰδίαν θεραπείαν), a proper man will be violently enraged."[831]

11.5 Conclusions and Prospects

We have looked at four different texts, each of which provides a window to Philo's conception of blasphemy. In *Fug.* 84, Philo's concept of blasphemy involved the notion of *accusing God falsely* by attributing evil to God. Offenders deserve immediate execution. In *Mos.* 2.203-208, Philo's exposition on Lev 24:10-23 suggested that idolatry—giving earthly realities equal honor or greater honor than God—provides fuel for blasphemy. In addition, Philo provided a three-fold scheme of blasphemy: cursing a so-called god is a high-crime, vocalizing the Name is a higher, and blaspheming God (revolting and nearly unthinkable) is the highest crime. In *Decal.* 61-65, Philo links blasphemy with stealing God's honor either through a public display of evil speech against God or by offering the honor that is due to God to human leaders or created realities. In *Somn.* 2.123-131, an Egyptian leader claimed to be as powerful as God and, to overstate it, thought he could rule over nature by changing the Seventh Day. Philo identified this—comparing oneself with God—as blasphemy. All four texts share some common themes. All four highlight the *verbal character of blasphemy*, but do not preclude non-verbal aspects. Three texts state that *execution is the punishment* for blasphemy. Three texts link blasphemy with *idolatry* and *attempting to steal honor from God.* And three texts talk about blasphemy in terms of *comparing oneself to God* or *making oneself equal to God* or *grasping for honor that belongs to God.*

How does Philo's perspective on blasphemy illuminate FG? First, as we saw in *Fug* 84, falsely accusing God or attributing evil to God counted as blasphemy. Nowhere in FG is Jesus or the disciples accused of this, even when FG presents Jesus defending himself against *speaking evil* (Jn 18:23).[832] Second, both *Mos.* 2.203-208 and *Decal.* 61-65 make it clear that giving earthly leaders and realities *honor equal to*

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[831] Goodenough (1938) 27.

[832] However, the Jewish disciples, who thought Jesus was from God, might have accused non-believing Jews of blasphemy for accusing Jesus of evil. That is, charges of blasphemy may have gone both ways between non-believing Jews and Jewish Christians. See Anderson (1986), who argues that Mark presents a battle of the blasphemies between Jews and Christians.

the gods (ἰσοθέων τιμῶν) paves the way to blaspheming Heaven. The issue is stealing honor from the God of Israel and giving it to false claimants, infringing on Jewish monotheistic sensitivities. There are indications that Jesus and his disciples were accused of this type of blasphemy. This will be addressed in chapter 13. Third, the most remarkable of all is *Somn.* 2.123-132, which condemns the Egyptian ruler of blasphemy because he tried to change Sabbath practices, making himself like God (*Somn.* 2.130). For anyone familiar with FG, this probably arouses thoughts of Jesus being accused of changing Sabbath practices (Jn 5:16-17) and then being stoned for comparing himself with God (Jn 5:18). Moreover, the problem with the Egyptian ruler was that he was *a mere man, claiming to be superior to others* (*Somn.* 2.132), which is just the sort of charge repeatedly brought against Jesus—*You, being a mere man, claim to be God* (Jn 10:33) and *He claimed to be the Son of God* (Jn 19:7). These issues will be addressed in chapter 13. Fourth, the Egyptian ruler's claim, *I am the whirlwind* (*Somn.* 2.129), and other self-comparisons with the acts of God or nature, reverberate with Jesus' famous *I am* sayings, such as *I am the bread of life* (Jn 6:48) or *I am the way, the truth, and the life* (Jn 14:6). Issues surrounding Jesus' use of the *I am* formula and blasphemy will not be addressed in this study, but it leaves room for further tantalizing research.

Chapter 12
Converging Portraits of Blasphemy

At this point, we want to present a *composite sketch* of blasphemy that draws from the seven discourses that we have just examined. As we have argued throughout, the seven discourses reflect first-century Jewish thought or else represent Jewish traditions that were well known during the first century. As such, we contend that Johannine Jewish Christians and their non-believing Jewish counterparts would have recognized our composite sketch. The sketch is composed of four strokes and responds to our guiding questions—What is blasphemy? And what are the consequences of committing blasphemy?

12.1 Against God

The first stroke in our sketch of blasphemy is that it is an offence against God. Even though Philo and Josephus warn about blaspheming the gods, their warning was ultimately for the purpose of preventing people from speaking evil against the one true God. Once that is taken into consideration, we can summarize the accounts of blasphemy that we have examined as depicting *an individual or a group of individuals who arrogantly and intentionally do or say something that discredits, disparages, or dishonors God.* This description has six elements to unpack.

First, blasphemy is performed by *an individual* or *a whole group.* Sennacherib, Antiochus, and Nicanor epitomize the blasphemer, yet whole groups such as Korah and his companions can be perpetrators of blasphemy.

Second, blasphemy is invariably associated with *extreme arrogance* and *intentional antagonism* toward God. Extreme arrogance is the odor of blasphemy. Take, for example, Antiochus, whose career reeked of violating one god's temple after another and who claimed equal honor with the gods. Or again, consider Nicanor, whose blasphemy stank with the assertion that he, not God, was sovereign over earth, or the Egyptian ruler, who dared to compare himself with God and even attempted to

change nature (the Seventh Day) itself. We have referred to this as *self-exaltative blasphemy*, where the offender attempts to elevate himself above others and even God, if that were possible. Remember the mockery of Sennacherib's boasting of *I have ascended* the highest mountains, *I have cut down* the tallest trees, *I have reached* the farthest places or, even more boastful, the Egyptian ruler's *I am* the whirlwind, the war, and the deluge. Blasphemy also invariably includes intentional antagonism toward God. Intentional antagonism distinguishes blasphemy from other grave offences, such as idolatry. Other grave offences may be committed unwittingly or ignorantly, but not blasphemy. Blasphemy is *high-handed sin*, knowingly and wittingly taking on God Himself. The Sabbath-breaker was one such character. He publicly and intentionally flouted the God of the Sabbath. Not least were the first Israelites who, in full knowledge of God's signs, wonders, and commands, blatantly rebelled or blasphemed God in the wilderness.

Third, blasphemy is performed by *doing* or *saying something* against God. The doing or saying is a public, not a private, event. In this way, blasphemy is a social reality in terms of perception and labeling. The concept of blasphemy changes from time-to-time and from group-to-group. With later rabbinic thought, blasphemy was largely limited to a verbal offence, but earlier Jewish literature indicates that blasphemy was perceived in a wide variety of actions, both verbal and non-verbal. Certainly, *naming the Name*, a reference to pronouncing the Name in a disrespectful manner or outside the appropriate context of the Temple, was a verbal offence in rabbinic and pre-rabbinic eras. Most blasphemy has a verbal component. Recall the depiction of Sennacherib, who shouted at God and threatened to rape Daughter Zion. Still, there are accounts of blasphemy in early Judaism entail non-verbal actions or malicious gestures against God. Think of Antiochus, whose blasphemies included a long list of non-verbal atrocities aimed at suppressing Judaism, and Nicanor, whose blasphemy included shaking his fist at the Temple.

Fourth, blasphemy *discredits God*. By this we mean that in the performance of blasphemy, the offender says or does something that aims at damaging the reputation of God or causing people to distrust Him. Sennacherib comes to mind. He attempted

to discredit God by insinuating that God was either unable or unwilling to stop the Assyrians from sacking Jerusalem. It was an assault on the credibility of God. Likewise, intentional murderers also blaspheme or discredit God when they claim divine refuge or protection because, as Philo argued, they make God an accomplice of their evil. It discredits the character or goodness of God.

Fifth, blasphemy *disparages God.* As we have seen, blasphemers make light of God, minimize His commandment, or show contempt for Him. We saw this with Sennacherib who mocked God's power and promises and then offered himself, not God, as a savior of Israel. Likewise, consider the *high-handed sin* of the Sabbath-breaker, who publicly snubbed God and brushed aside His commandment by picking up sticks on the Sabbath. Such *high-hand sin* reads the law, knows the law, and yet throws it into the wind like worthless chaff.

Sixth, blasphemy *dishonors God.* In the performance of blasphemy, God's honor and glory are threatened. This happens when God is lowered, as when Sennacherib spoke of God as though He were another impotent so-called god, or when a person is elevated, as the Egyptian ruler and Antiochus who dared to compare themselves with God. Here, Jewish monotheistic sensitivities are violated when equal honor is given to Creator and creature, or when more honor is given to the creature than the Creator. In an honor-shame culture, where honor is viewed as a limited good, claiming such honor tantamount to stealing from God. Claiming the same honor, glory, power, or prerogatives as God denies God's uniqueness. It is like saying there is "someone else" in addition to God or instead of God that deserves such glory. Here, blasphemy and idolatry are fused and conspire to violate monotheism.

12.2 Against the Temple

The second stroke in our sketch of blasphemy is that verbal or non-verbal attacks on the Temple *count as* blasphemy against God Himself. In the ancient world, it is hard to conceive of a more direct way to threaten a deity than to threaten his or her temple. For the Jews, the Temple symbolized the dwelling-place of God, the cosmic center of the universe, and the election of Israel. To blaspheme the Temple was to assault God,

the stability of the world, and Israel herself. To profane the Temple was to blaspheme the very Name that dwelled there. Consider Nicanor, whose threat to destroy the Temple and raise another was characterized as *blaspheming* (δυσφημεῖν) the Temple and *speaking wickedly* (κακῶς λαλεῖν) against the sanctuary. Or think of Antiochus, who was a *theomachos* (one who contends with God), not just because he stole God's honor by claiming equality with God, but more literally because he tramped into the house of God and dared to rob it. It is little wonder that in response to Antiochus' wide ranging blasphemies, Mattathias' lament focuses almost entirely on Antiochus' violation of the Temple. In early Judaism, threatening and plundering the Temple was a vivid and concrete attack on God.

12.3 Against the Leadership

A third stroke in our sketch of blasphemy is that verbal or non-verbal attacks on the leaders of God's people *can count as* blasphemy against God Himself. As we saw, the Book of the Covenant presents earthly authority going hand-in-hand with heavenly authority. Thus, the parallelism in Exod 22:27(28) is no surprise: *To speak evil* (κακῶς λογεῖν) of Israel's rulers is *to blaspheme* (κακολογεῖν) God. The indissoluble union between heavenly and earthly authority is reflected in the often-repeated injunction in Jewish literature to honor father and mother because, as human authorities, they reflect the Father and Maker of us all. Recall Israel's rebellion in the wilderness. It began as opposition to the leadership of Moses and Aaron and led to despising and blaspheming God. Think of the mutiny of Korah and his associates against Moses. It was portrayed as an illegitimate and blasphemous grasp for divine authority; thus God, not Moses, eliminated the mutineers. Or consider Sennacherib, whose verbal attack on God went hand-in-hand with derision of Hezekiah the king, or Nicanor, whose threat to the Temple included mocking, deriding and defiling the priests. To speak or act contemptuously of earthly authority is to blaspheme heaven itself.

12.4 Results in Death

A fourth stroke in our sketch of blasphemy concerns its consequences, namely, *execution* or *excommunication of the offender.* In the case of the Egyptian-Hebrew,

who had cursed God, Moses is presented as making a precedent-setting judgment because such an offense was the first of its kind. Moses decided that the people were to lead the offender outside the camp, lay hands on him, and then stone him to death. We argued that this action could be understood as *kārēt* or being *cut off* from the people of God. *Kārēt* involves the extirpation of a person and his descendants, sometimes by human action (execution) and sometimes by divine action (extermination). Following Horbury, we also argued that during the Second Temple period *excommunication* sometimes *took the place of the death penalty*. That blasphemy leads to death is confirmed by almost every case that we have examined. The Sabbath-breaker was stoned to death. The rebellious Israelites, who despised God and snubbed his covenant, died in the wilderness and never made it to the Promised Land. The ground miraculously swallowed Korah and fire consumed his co-mutineers. Sennacherib's sons assassinated him, Antiochus died a humiliating and painful death, while Nicanor was killed in battle and then dismembered.

12.5 Conclusions

Blasphemy strikes at the very core of Judaism, which centers on one God, the Temple, and the election of Israel, represented by her leaders.[833] In Part three, we will compare this sketch of blasphemy with the theology of FG. In chapter 13, we examine the exaltation of Jesus and compare it with the first stroke of blasphemy. In chapter 14, we examine FG's theology of the Temple and compare it with the second stroke. And, in chapter 15, we examine FG's polemic against the Ἰουδαῖοι and compare it with the third stroke. In our conclusion, we suggest connections between the fourth stroke and the expulsion of the Jewish Christians from the synagogue.

[833] Dunn (1991) 18-36 provides a useful description of Second Temple Judaism in terms of *four pillars:* monotheism, the Temple, the election of Israel, and the Torah.

PART III

THE BLASPHEMY OF THE JOHANNINE COMMUNITY

In Part III, we will use the *composite portrait* of blasphemy to examine whether non-believing Jews would have viewed the Johannine community as blasphemous. We focus on three Johannine claims that correspond to the first three strokes of our composite sketch of blasphemy—*Jesus is equal with God* (chapter 13), *Jesus is the New Temple* (chapter 14), and *the Ἰουδαῖοι are of the Devil* (chapter 15)—and argue that non-believing Jews would have regarded each of these claims as blasphemous. We conclude by suggesting that non-believing Jews would have condemned and excommunicated the Johannine Jewish Christians as blasphemers (chapter 16).

CHAPTER 13
"JESUS IS EQUAL WITH GOD"

In the previous section we argued that blasphemy in early Judaism may be characterized as verbal or non-verbal public displays intended to discredit, disparage, or dishonor God and, by association, similar attacks on God's Temple or God's chosen leaders also counted as blasphemy. Thus, any attack against God, God's Temple, and God's chosen leaders would have been grounds for the charge of blasphemy.

In this chapter, we focus on the statement that Jesus was ἴσον ἑαυτὸν ποιῶν τῷ θεῷ (*making himself equal with God*) (Jn 5:18) and address whether that would have been considered an attack against God, His honor or His uniqueness. We address what the author of FG wanted readers to understand about the claim in 5:18, how a first-century Jewish audience might have interpreted it, and whether non-believing Jews would have considered it to be blasphemous.

13.1 A flashpoint for the Johannine community

Within the narrative of FG, the claim that Jesus was *making himself equal with God* is presented as the basis for a violent reaction from non-believing *Jews*.[834] Because of the uniqueness of the language used to express the claim in 5:18,[835] the vehemence of the *Jewish* reaction, and the extended monologue in 5:19-47, which functions as an explanation for what is said in 5:18, it is likely that 5:18 exposes a *point of sensitivity* or a *flashpoint* in the social and theological milieu of FG.[836] The text is, therefore, a

[834] As stated earlier, the term *the Jews* and *Jews* (in italics) will refer to the literary construct or corporate character within the narrative of FG, whereas the term without italics has historical reference.

[835] In the NT, the adjective, ἴσος, η, ον (*equal to, the same as*), is only used twice in reference to Jesus; once in Jn 5:18—ἴσος ἑαυτὸν ποιῶν τῷ θεῷ (*making himself equal with God*)—and once in Phil 2:6—οὐχ ἁρπαγμὸν ἡγήσατο τὸ εἶναι ἴσα θεῷ (*he did not count equality with God something to grasp*).

[836] On *points of sensitivity*, see Dunn (1998b) 354, Motyer (1997) 35-36, and our comments in § 1.5.6. Some corroboration for our selection is found in Westermann (1998) 24-60, who identifies five *controversy dialogues*—Jn 5:17-47, 6:25-65, 7:14-30(36), 8:12-59, and 10:22-39. Westermann notes

very important window into the Johannine world and the struggles they faced. In this way, we assume a moderate *two-level* reading of FG, where the *story of the Johannine Jesus* reveals something about *the trauma and experience of the Johannine community*. As Loader has argued, the accusations reflected in Jn 5:18 "are doubtless ... real accusations hurled at the Johannine community by Jewish critics."[837]

> As we have noted earlier,[838] FG seems to invite a two-level reading. For example, before his departure *the experience of Jesus* is projected forward in time to *the experience of his disciples*—"If the world hates you, be aware that it hated me before it hated you" (NRSV; Jn 15:18). Or again, as we mentioned earlier, FG is cast in the form of an extended trial[839] that witnesses to both the trial of Jesus and the trial of his followers.[840] The two trials merge and yet are distinct. They merge in Jn 3:11, where Jesus speaks in the first person plural: "Very truly, I tell you, we speak of what we know and testify to what we have seen; yet you do not receive our testimony" (NRSV). Yet the trial of Jesus is distinct from his followers' trial. Jesus states that after his departure it will be necessary for both the Advocate and his followers to testify on his behalf, particularly when the time comes when they face expulsion from the synagogue and threats of death (Jn 15:26—16:4).

The two-level reading, made famous by Martyn, is defended elsewhere.[841] Our acceptance of a two-level reading does not mean that we believe every tradition or pericope in FG addresses the *Sitz-im-Leben* of a specific local community,[842] or that each character or event in FG has an allegorical counterpart in the Johannine

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that each of the five *controversy dialogues* are *conspicuous* in depicting *Jesus* and *the Jews* in conflict and, he believes, are *foreign elements* in FG in that they depict a time long after Jesus' death (24).

[837] Loader (1992) 161.

[838] See § 1.2 and § 1.5.7.

[839] See § 3.3; Lincoln (2000) *passim*, esp. 12-35; Harvey (1976) 123.

[840] Lincoln (2000) 34.

[841] In addition to Martyn (1979), Ashton (1991) 412-20, esp. 418 provides justification for reading FG as a two-level drama. Ashton notes that the narrator's aside or "riddling saying" in Jn 2:22 (cf. 12:16) is placed early in FG and functions as a key for reading the remainder of the Gospel because it calls for drawing an analogy between *Jesus' hearers* and *John's readers*. Lincoln (2000) 20-21 also notes that certain literary features of FG, such as Johannine irony and the retrospective ideological point of view, "dovetails with Martyn's discussion of the Gospel as a 'two-level drama.'" (21).

[842] Bauckham (1998) 9-48 challenges the long-standing assumption that the Gospels were intended for a specific church or group of churches, arguing that the Gospels had a much broader audience, *all Christians*. Esler (1998) 235-47 criticizes Bauckham's argument on several counts. Two are worth mentioning here. First, Bauckham only sees two options; either the Gospels were written to a local community or to *all Christians*. Esler argues that Bauckham overlooks a third option; that is, the Gospels were written *within* and *for* a local community (reflecting the social world of the ancient Mediterranean where people were embedded in groups), but with the view that they could have broader circulation. Second, Esler rejects Bauckham's category of *all Christians*, which "did not exist as a category of persons capable of being addressed in this period. What existed was a network of cells, possibly in communication but if so probably troubled with division, which simply did not provide a basis for such a general communicative aim" (242).

community,[843] or that a detailed historical development of such a community can be reconstructed on the basis of hypothetical source and redaction criticism.[844] It is to make the more modest claim that when we discern *points of sensitivity* in FG it is likely that they signal something about the experiences and concerns of the Jewish Christians who produced and propagated the Gospel. Thus, we assume that Jn 5:18, because of the force, the depiction of the reaction, and the uniqueness of the language, reveals a *point of sensitivity* or witnesses to a *flashpoint* in the life of the Johannine community.

13.2 The structure of Jn 5:16-30

A number of scholars have written on the trial motif in FG,[845] and most recently, and most thoroughly, Andrew Lincoln has contributed a monograph on the topic. Among other things, Lincoln traces the *trial proceeding* through *eight stages*, highlighting elements of the lawsuit motif and their function at each step.[846] In Lincoln's scheme, Jn 5:16-30 forms part of the third *stage* in the extended trial and it narrates the first time *the Jews* try to stone Jesus in FG.

Our target text is comprised of two verbal exchanges between Jesus and *the Jews* (5:16-18 and 5:19-30). Each exchange has a reaction-explanation-response pattern with the second response forming an extended reply in a chiastic structure.[847]

> **Reaction**: Persecuting Jesus (16a)
> **Explanation**: Because Jesus works on the Sabbath (16b)
> **Response**: "My Father works until now and I am working" (17)

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[843] E.g., Martyn (1979).

[844] E.g., Brown (1979) *passim*, Martyn (1977) 149-75, and Neyrey (1988) *passim*.

[845] See § 3.3; Harvey (1976) *passim*; Trites (1977) 78-127; Lincoln (1994) 3-30.

[846] Lincoln (2000) 57-138 delineates *eight key stages* or passages that carry the lawsuit motif forward in FG, including pericopes on (1) the testimony of John the Baptist (Jn 1:1-8, 15, 19-34; 3:25-300; (2) the testimony from above and judgment of the light (3:11-21, 31-36); (3) Jesus as Just Judge and the testimonies to Jesus (5:19-47); (4) the truth of Jesus' testimony and judgment (8:12-59); (5) the interrogation of the man born blind (9:1-41); (6) Jesus and the judgment of the world (12:37-50); (7) the preparation of the disciples for testifying and the role of the Paraclete (15:26—16:15); and (8) the trial before Pilate (18:2—19:16a). Lincoln admits that more passages could be added, such as the disputes during the Feast of Tabernacles (7:14-39) and the interrogation or mini-trial of Jesus (10:22-39).

[847] Our argumentation will not depend on the chiastic structure, though it does seem to lend itself to such a structure on the basis of subjective (thematic) and objective (grammatical/linguistic) criteria. See Mlakuzhyil (1987) 126-8 and Talbert (1992) 124.

Reaction: Seeking to kill Jesus (18a)
Explanation: Because he broke the Sabbath and made himself equal with God (18c-d)
Response: Jesus answered (19a)
Dependence: The Son is not able to do anything from himself (19b)
Amazement: The Father shows the Son everything ... you will be amazed (20)
Life/Judgment: The Father gives life, so also the Son (21-22)
The Son is given all judgment so that *all may honor him* (23)
Hearing/Life: The one hearing and believing has life (24)
Hearing/Life: The dead will hear and have life (25)
Life/Judgment: The Father has life in himself, so also the Son (26)
The Son has authority to judge, because *he is Son of Man* (27)
Amazement: Do not be amazed... resurrection is coming (28-29)
Dependence: I am not able to do anything from myself (30)

The outline highlights the balance, symmetry, and repetition of the passage, which can provide clues for its interpretation. Even points of asymmetry—regarding *honoring the Son* (23) and *he is the Son of Man* (27)—may signal where the author was clarifying an important point. For the moment, however, we want to focus on how the structure places emphasis on 5:18.

In the first verbal exchange (5:16-17), Jesus' response in 5:17b is only comprised of eight words. However, in the second exchange (5:18-30), Jesus' response in 5:19-30 is comprised of 252 words and, if 5:31-47 is included, then Jesus' second response has 523 words (UBS[4]). Clearly, FG puts a great deal of emphasis on Jesus' second response. It highlights the significance of what the second response is responding to, namely, the astonishing charge in 5:18:

For this reason the Jews were seeking all the more to kill him, because he was not only breaking the sabbath, but was also calling God his own Father, thereby **making himself equal to God** (NRSV).	διὰ τοῦτο οὖν μᾶλλον ἐζήτουν αὐτὸν οἱ Ἰουδαῖοι ἀποκτεῖναι, ὅτι οὐ μόνον ἔλυεν τὸ σάββατον, ἀλλὰ καὶ πατέρα ἴδιον ἔλεγεν τὸν θεόν ἴσον ἑαυτὸν ποιῶν τῷ θεῷ (UBS[4]).

The charge of *making himself equal to God* in 5:18d can be understood as *the hinge* on which the rest of the passage turns. Jn 5:18d *looks back* to Jesus' healing on the Sabbath (5:1-9) and his claim to work as the Father works (5:17) and it *looks forward* to Jesus' qualification in 5:19-30 and the witnesses he draws on in 5:31-47. Here, we want to focus on the inner structure of 5:16-19ff,[848] because it highlights some of the

[848] This is similar to Robbins (1996) 7-37 use of the term *inner texture*.

structural and semantic parallels which, in turn, have important theological consequences! There are clear parallels between 5:16-17 and 5:18-30:

Reaction	*Therefore* (διὰ τοῦτο) the Jews started persecuting (ἐδίωκον) Jesus, (16)
Explanation	*because* (ὅτι) he was doing such things on the sabbath.
Response	Jesus answered (ἀπεκρίνατο) them, (17)
	"My Father is still working, and *I also* (κἀγὼ) am working."
Reaction	*For this reason* (διὰ τοῦτο) the Jews were seeking all the more to kill him, (18)
Explanation	*because* (ὅτι) he was not only breaking the sabbath,
	but was also calling God his own Father,
	thereby making himself equal to God.
Response	Jesus *said* (ἀπεκρίνατο) to them ... (19-30) (NRSV)

The reaction of 5:18a parallels the reaction of 5:16a. Both begin with διὰ τοῦτο, both have the same subjects (*the Jews*), both set an impromptu trial in motion, and both state the intentions of *the Jews* with the imperfect tense, either "they started prosecuting Jesus" (ἐδίωκον ... τὸν Ἰησοῦν)[849] or "they were seeking to kill him" (ἐζήτουν αὐτον ... ἀποκτεῖναι).

The explanation in 5:18b—"because he was not only breaking the Sabbath"—answers why *the Jews* were seeking to *persecute* or *prosecute* (ἐδίωκον)[850] Jesus and reiterates the explanation in 5:16b—"because he used to do such things on the Sabbath." It is noteworthy that in the escalating battle of wits between Jesus and *the Jews,* the Sabbath violation is not left behind, like an irrelevant stepping-stone. It is reiterated and brought alongside the next charge in 5:18c. The connection with the Sabbath will be discussed in § 13.5.

The explanation in 5:18c is a new charge—"he was calling God his own Father." It is in response to Jesus' claim in 5:16b—"My Father is still working, *and I* (κἀγὼ) also am working." Jesus' claim that he works just like God justifies his healing of the paralytic on the Sabbath, but it also functions to further incriminate him. For the

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[849] Harvey (1976) 51 argues that διώκειν can mean *to bring a charge against, to prosecute,* as well as *to persecute.*

[850] Harvey (1976) 51 argues that διώκειν can mean *to bring a charge against, to prosecute,* as well as *to persecute.*

moment, it is important to note the reciprocal force of the term κἀγὼ (*and I*)[851] in 5:17b and how it places Jesus on *equal* footing with God before the word ἴσος (*equal*) is used in 5:18d.[852]

The explanation in 5:18d—he was "thereby making himself equal to God" (ἴσον ἑαυτὸν ποιῶν τῷ θεῷ)—draws out the offensive implication of 5:18c. That is, taking the participle, ποιῶν, as *an adverbial participle of result*[853] explains why calling God his Father was so offensive. Why calling God, *Father*, is so offensive is not readily apparent since, presumably, it was the right of every Jew. However, once we look at the text, it is not simply that Jesus is calling God, *Father*; he is claiming that there is continuity (of authority to work) between himself and the Father expressed by the use of κἀγὼ (*and I*) in 5:17b. Thus, the Johannine Jesus expresses the Father-Son relationship as one of continuity and equality, and that was offensive.

Lastly, but of critical importance, Jesus' response in 5:17—"My Father is still working, and I also am working"—parallels Jesus' response about the Father-Son relationship in 5:19-30. In this way, the Father-Son relationship, which is introduced in 5:17, and then picked up and interpreted by the phrase "making himself equal with God" in 5:18, is finally expanded and qualified in 5:19-30.

13.3 Who claims that Jesus is *making himself equal with God*?

What conclusion did the author of FG want readers to draw concerning the phrase *making himself equal to God* (ἴσον ἑαυτὸν ποιῶν τῷ θεῷ)? Was it something the narrator of FG was affirming about Jesus, but which *the Jews* refused to accept? Or was it a misunderstanding by *the Jews*, which needed to be corrected? There are many interpretations of 5:18d, but they can be grouped into three basic options: *a*

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[851] Formed by crasis from καὶ and ἐγὼ, the word κἀγὼ expresses a reciprocal relationship; so BAGD, 286. This is born out in Jn 10:15, 38; 14:20; 15:4.

[852] See Barrett (1978) 256.

[853] The force of the participle ποιῶν is probably best understood as an adverbial participle of result; thus, ἴσον ἑαυτὸν ποιῶν τῷ θεῷ expresses the outcome or corollary of πατέρα ἴδιον ἔλεγεν τὸν θεόν. See Wallace (1994) 638. In contrast, McGrath (1998b) 472 offers a novel reading of ποιῶν as a concessive participle thereby rendering the phrase *although he claimed equality with God.*

'Jewish' misunderstanding, the narrator's authoritative comment, or *an ironic misunderstanding.* We will examine each in turn.

13.3.1 A *Jewish* misunderstanding

Some scholars argue that verse 18d expresses a *Jewish* misunderstanding.[854] Scholars of this persuasion argue that *the Jews* thought Jesus was claiming equality with God (5:18) when he called God his Father (5:17); however, Jesus never claimed such equality and because *the Jews* misunderstood Jesus, they mistakenly and unlawfully sought to kill him on the grounds of blasphemy. For example, de Jonge writes, "the author of this gospel argues at great length to refute this charge of blasphemy; for him too, it was unthinkable that Jesus would have claimed equality with God."[855] This option has been supported by two basic arguments.

The first argument focuses on what *the Jews* misunderstood. Odeberg, whose analysis has influenced many Johannine scholars, begins by describing how first century Jews would have heard 5:18. Odeberg writes:

> The formula ἴσον ἑαυτὸν ποιῶν τῷ θεῷ corresponds exactly to the Rabbinic expression משוה את עצמו לאלהים which to a Rabbinic ear is equivalent to 'makes himself independent of God.'[856]

Odeberg explains that Jesus' offense was not that he called God *Father* but that, to Jewish ears, he would have sounded like a son who had rebelled against paternal authority by claiming the right to perform the same work as his Father.[857] The phrase, ἴσος τῷ θεῷ, was heard as *a declaration of independence from God,* setting Jesus up as a rival god, the offense of Antiochus Epiphanes, if not *Lucifer* himself.[858] However, as Jn 5:19-30 reveals, Jesus directly and vigorously denies this *Jewish*

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[854] In this category, we place: (1) Beasley-Murray (1987) 75; (2) Bernard (1929) 1.238, who says, "the actual phrase ἴσος θεῷ is not part of the claim of Jesus for Himself"; (3) Brown (1966) 1.214cf. 24; (4) Bultmann (1971) 244-45; (5) Margaret Davies (1992) 135; (6) Dodd (1953) 327-28; (7) de Jonge (1996) 226; (8) Hoskyns (1947) 254-55; (9) D. Lee (1994) 113; (10) McGrath (1998b) 470-73; (11) Odeberg (1968 [1929]) 203; (12) Spicq (1994) 2.230, who paraphrases 5:18 as, "When the *Pharisees declared* that 'He said that God was his own father, making himself equal to God'"; (13) Talbert (1992) 124.

[855] de Jonge (1996) 226.

[856] Odeberg (1968 [1929]) 203.

[857] Odeberg (1968 [1929]) 203.

misunderstanding by claiming complete dependence on the Father. Still, most interpreters believe that Jn 5:19-30 suggest some type of qualified (e.g., functional) equivalence between the Son and the Father. Dodd's final comment on the matter is worth quoting: "It is difficult to deny τὸ ἰσόθεον, in some sense ... [but] ... if the evangelist had been asked whether or not he intended to affirm that Christ was ἴσος τῷ θεῷ, he would have been obliged to reply that ἴσος, whether affirmed or denied, is not a proper term to use in this context."[859] Dodd believes FG's preferred way to speak of the Father and Son relationship was not in terms of *equality*, but in terms of *oneness*.

A second argument, put forward by Margaret Davies, depends on distinguishing between the *narrative time* (roughly when the author presented the story) and the *story time* (roughly when the events in the story supposedly occurred). When applying this distinction to Jn 5:18, Davies writes:

> Although this is a narrative account of 'Jewish' accusations against Jesus, commentators propose that it is to be understood ironically, as an accusation within the story, but as a true statement on the narrative level. It can hardly function in that way, however, because Jesus' discourse in 5.19-46 refutes this accusation. Jesus is the Son of God, but he is not equal to God. He can do nothing of his own accord (5.19, 30).[860]

For Davies, Jn 5:18d expresses a non-ironic, *Jewish* misunderstanding that is refuted by Jesus in Jn 5:19-47. If Jn 5:18 was ironically true at the narrative level, it would contradict what is expressed by Jesus at the story level, and this cannot be. Hence, for Davies, FG presents Jesus as an exemplary human being, totally dependent on God, but not equal to God.

This option (exemplified by Odeberg and Davies) is appealing because of its use of comparative literature to help sort out the problem, but ultimately it must be rejected. It is weakened by the fact that Odeberg's rabbinic sources are not confirmed,[861]

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[858] On Antiochus, see chapter 9. Dodd (1953) 327 draws a connection with *Lucifer*—see LXX Isa 14:14: "I will ascend to the tops of the clouds, I will make myself like [ἔσομαι ὅμοιος] the Most High"—and states that "the heresy of the 'two principles' arises; there is a δεύτερος θεὸς."

[859] Dodd (1953) 328, n. 2.

[860] Margaret Davies (1992) 135.

[861] Odeberg (1968 [1929]) 203, n. 2, lists "GrR. 28 SH 28b O.a.s.p 136" as sources. In commenting on Odeberg's argument, Dodd (1953) 326 writes, "This would fit the present passage [5:18] admirably, but I have not been able to confirm the quotation." Similarly, neither we (using the

though McGrath has recently come to Odeberg's assistance. McGrath argues that even without the elusive Rabbinic references, Odeberg's insight—that a claim to be equal with one's father would be viewed as rebellious—can be sustained by other literature of that period.[862] McGrath and Odeberg assume that Jesus' claim to sonship in 5:17 is *non-unique* claim and so believe that *the Jews* are not objecting to Jesus calling God his Father *per se*, but only to his rebellious tone.[863] Unfortunately, this contradicts the explicit statement that *the Jews* condemned Jesus for his claim of *unique sonship* with God (cf. 19:7). McGrath and Odeberg also believe that *the Jews* (mistakenly) object to Jesus claiming equality with God, something they believe Jesus denies in 5:19-30. However, their argument is not convincing, since it overlooks the fact that, while Jesus rejects the notion that he is a rebellious son (5:19, 30), he also claims equality with the Father in matters of honor (5:23), judgment (5:22, 27), and giving life (5:22, 26-7). Davies' argument does not rescue this interpretation either. Her distinction between the story and the narrative levels is valid, yet she fails to see that the irony of Jn 5:18 can function on both the story and narrative levels. As argued in § 13.3.3 below, within the story, Jesus refutes part of the charge as false (*making himself* something) and yet, still at the story level, Jesus affirms another part of the charge as true (*equality with God*).

13.3.2 The narrator's authoritative comment

Some scholars argue that Jn 5:18d expresses an authoritative comment by the author of FG.[864] In this view, the narrator tells us that whenever Jesus called God his own Father, he was "thereby declaring that he was equal to God."[865] The *Jews* correctly

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Davka's Judaic Classics Library on CD-ROM, Soncino Classics Collection) nor McGrath (1998b) 470-73 have found the quotation in Rabbinic sources.

[862] McGrath (1998b) 470-73 argues that the customary father-son relationship in the first-century was one of superior father relating to subordinate son. A disobedient or rebellious son brought great shame and was routinely castigated by ancient authors. Thus, a claim to be equal to one's father would be viewed as insubordination and therefore rebellious and contemptible.

[863] McGrath (1998b) 472, n. 14, argues that the use of ἴδιον in 5:18c should be understood as simply *his Father* and not emphatically as *his own Father*.

[864] In this category, we place: (1) Appold (1976) 23; (2) Barrett (1978) 256, who writes, "This inference John of course himself admits, but rightly presents it as extremely provocative to the Jews"; (3) Carson (1991) 249-50; (4) Hanson (1991 69 observes that "John gives us no indication that this [v. 18d] is not what it does in fact mean"; (5) Harris (1992) 125 states "Unique sonship implies deity (Jn 5:18; cf. 19:7)"; (6) Pancaro (1975) 155. (7) Sundberg (1970) 29 argues that there is a distinct "equal with God" christology in Jn 5:17-20.

[865] BAGD 682 translates ἴσον ἑαυτὸν ποιῶν τῷ θεῷ in this way.

understood what Jesus was claiming and so, given their understanding of Jewish law, sought to execute him. Thus, Jn 5:18d reflects the christology of FG itself. For example, Pancaro asserts that "The Jews are not mistaken in their interpretation of Jesus' words: he is calling God his Father in a special sense, making himself equal to God."[866] This viewpoint has been supported in four ways.

First, 5:18d is an explanation by the narrator of FG and thus it is not misleading, since the narrator of FG is both *omniscient* and *reliable*.[867] The narrator of FG *knows everything,* from what happened before the beginning of creation (1:1-3) to what Jesus is thinking (2:24-25). The narrator of FG *never misleads* the reader and often clarifies ambiguities and explains what might be misunderstood. Because Jn 5:18 is in the narrator's *voice*, it is unlikely that it expresses a *Jewish misunderstanding*.[868] If the narrator was expressing a *Jewish misunderstanding*, we would expect the narrator to tell the reader—"The *Jews* sought to kill Jesus because they thought he was making himself equal to God"—as in other instances when the narrator reads the minds and motives of *the Jews*.[869]

Second, if one takes 5:18d as an authoritative comment by the narrator, then it is describing Jesus as *equal with God* (ἴσος τῷ θεῷ). This is not unexpected because, as we noted previously, Jesus has described himself on equal footing with the Father when he used the term κἀγὼ (*and I*) in 5:17. Furthermore, equality with God is confirmed by Jesus' response in 5:19-30 where he declares that he completely and veraciously exercises the two great powers of God—giving life (5:21, 24) and rendering judgment (5:22, 27).[870] It also resonates with other things FG tells us about

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[866] Pancaro (1975) 155.

[867] Culpepper (1983) 16-49, esp. 21-26 and 32-33.

[868] Culpepper (1983) 152-65 identifies 18 instances of misunderstanding, none of which includes 5:18. However, D. Lee (1994) 112-13 views 5:18 as exemplifying *misunderstanding* in the third of five narrative stages.

[869] Other examples of the narrator's ability to understand and explain the mind and motives of the *Jews* include: (1) Jn 8:27: "They did not understand that he spoke to them of the Father." (2) Jn 12:42: "Many of the authorities believed in him, but for fear of the Pharisees they did not confess it." (3) Jn 12:43: "They loved the praise of men more than the praise of God."

[870] *b. Ta'an.* 2a refers to two ways in which God is active on the Sabbath: giving life and judging life at death. Dodd (1953) 322-23 suggests that the two supreme powers of God, salvation and judgment, are alluded to in Jn 5:19-29. Neyrey (1988) 21-22 identifies the two powers as God's creative power (5:19-20) and God's eschatological/judgmental power (5:21-29). Concerning the two-powers heresy, see § 13.3.3 and Segal (1979).

Jesus, including his title as θεός (1:1, 18; 20:28), oneness with God (10:30, 38; 14:11; 17:11), use of ἐγὼ εἰμί (6:20; 8:24, 28, 58; 13:19; 18:5-6, 8),[871] origin and destiny (1:1-5; 16:28; 17:5), and divine authority (3:35; 5:21-22, 26-27).

Third, an important consideration is FG's use of ποιεῖν (*to make*) in 5:18, which has a positive connotation (contrary to the assumption of the first option). That is, the claim that Jesus was ***making*** (ποιῶν) ***himself equal to God*** has a positive (not a negative) valence within chapter 5.[872] For example, the use of ποιεῖν (*to do* or *to make*) pertains to *doing* healings (5:11, 15, 16) and what the Father and Son *do* (5:19), including *making life* (5:21) and *making judgment* (5:27). Whatever Jesus does, it is the Father working in and through him. Thus, Pancaro writes:

> The use of ποιεῖν in Jn culminates in the affirmation: Jesus made (ποιεῖν) himself equal to God (5:18; 8:53; 10:33) by making (ἐποίησεν) himself the Son of God (19:7). We are to understand: his making himself equal to God was the result of what he did (ποιεῖν): his ἔργα, σημεῖα, his ἔργον of giving life (ζωοποιεῖν) and judging (κρίσιν ποιεῖν).... When Jn asks that the Jews come to know what Jesus "does," he is asking that they come to recognize Jesus for what he is. The two go hand in hand.[873]

In this way, Pancaro argues that FG's use of ποιεῖν (*to make*) in Jn 5:18d implies that ontological christology (who Jesus is) flows out of functional christology (what Jesus does); in this respect, Jesus *makes himself* equal with God.

This option (exemplifed by Pancaro and Barrett) is appealing because it recognizes the function of the narrator and draws on the literary context of FG. However, it is not entirely persuasive. Arguing that 5:18d is a reliable explanation by the narrator of FG, who does not mislead readers, may itself be misleading. Jn 5:18d could express *Jewish* misunderstanding without the narrator explicitly telling the reader. This seems to happen in Jn 18:28 when the narrator tells the reader that *the Jews* did not enter the Praetorium "lest they defile themselves." Of course, from the author's perspective *the Jews* would not have ritually defiled themselves, but it did not thereby require the

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[871] The absolute form of ἐγὼ εἰμί (*I am*) in FG recalls its use in the LXX, where it substitutes for the tetragrammaton (e.g., Exod 3:13-15; Isa 43:10-11, 25-26). Lincoln (2000) 46-9 argues that FG reworks the Deutero-Isaiah lawsuits such that Jesus use of ἐγὼ εἰμί emphasizes his oneness with the Father. Williams (2000) now appears to be the definitive work on the ἐγὼ εἰμί formula.

[872] See the treatment of ποιεῖν (*to make*) and τὸ θέλημα τοῦ θεοῦ ποιεῖν (*to do the will of God*) in Pancaro (1975) 155-56 and 368-402.

narrator to say, "because they thought it would defile them." Furthermore, Pancaro's analysis of the verb, ποιεῖν (*to make*), is impressive; but, he does not consider the verb, ποιεῖν (*to make*), in combination with the reflexive pronouns, ἑαυτοῦ (*of himself*) or ἑαυτὸν (*himself*). Hence, his analysis of ποιεῖν is forced and must yield to the analysis of ποιεῖν ἑαυτοῦ in option three.

13.3.3 An ironic misunderstanding

Some scholars understand 5:18d as an ironic misunderstanding involving the two-fold phrase (1) *making himself* (2) *equal with God.*[874] In this view, *the Jews* have incorrectly assumed that Jesus is *making himself* something—that he is self-promoting—when in fact he is not. Jesus rejects this aspect of the charge (5:19, 30). Ironically, *the Jews*, who are portrayed as masters of misunderstanding throughout FG, correctly discern that Jesus is *claiming equality with God* when he calls God his Father. Jesus affirms this aspect of the charge. He is equal to God in matters of honor (5:23), judgment (5:22, 27), and giving life (5:21, 26).[875] From within this interpretative framework, Meeks write: "Jesus has not 'made himself' θεός or υἱος θεοῦ; he was from 'the beginning.'"[876] There are three supporting arguments.

First, the parallelisms between Jn 5:18, 10:33, and 19:7 "suggest that ἴσος τῷ θεῷ, υἱος τοῦ θεοῦ, and θεός, as applied to Jesus, all have roughly the same force for the Johannine Christians or for their opponents."[877] That is, within the μονός θεός commitments of the Johannine community (5:44; 17:3), the terms *God, Son of God,* and *equal with God* are also valid christological predicates (5:18; 10:33; 19:7).

Second, the use of the genitive reflexive pronouns ἑαυτοῦ (*of himself*) and ἐμαυτοῦ (*of myself*) in Jn 5:18-30 reveals an emphatic denial by Jesus. The charge that Jesus was *making himself* (ἑαυτὸν ποιῶν) something (5:18d) is emphatically denied in

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[873] Pancaro (1975) 155-56.

[874] In this category, we place: (1) Ashton (1994) 72; (2) Loader (1992) 160-61; (3) Meeks (1990) 310-11; (4) Neyrey (1988) 20-21; (5) Painter (1993) 227, n. 55; (6) Witherington (1995) 139.

[875] Most scholars in this camp view the *equality* as functional, not ontological. Thus, Loader (1992) 161 writes, "In his being he is dependent and subordinate; in his doing he is equal."

[876] Meeks (1990) 310.

[877] Meeks (1990) 310.

5:19-30. Jesus categorically denies that he made anything *of himself* (ἀφ' ἑαυτοῦ) (5:19, 30). Jesus did not make himself God's equal; he was so already!

Third, the use of the verb ποιεῖν (*to make*) with the reflexive pronouns, either the accusative, ἑαυτὸν (*himself*), or genitive, ἑαυτοῦ (*of himself*) reveals something about the Johannine conception of blasphemy. The verb and the reflexive pronoun occur eight times in FG with three different voices.

- Narrator: He was *making himself* equal with God (5:18d)
- Jesus: The Son is not able *to make* anything *of himself* (5:19)
- Jesus: I am not able *to make* anything *of myself* (5:30)
- Jesus: You will know that I am (ἐγὼ εἰμί) and *I make* nothing *of myself* (8:28)
- *Jews*: Who do you *make yourself* (8:53)
- *Jews*: Being a man *you make yourself* God (10:33)
- *Jews*: *He made himself* the Son of God (19:7)
- *Jews*: Everyone who *makes himself* king speaks against Caesar (19:12)

Here we can see that for *the Jews* the verb ποιεῖν (*to make*) with the reflexive pronoun ἑαυτοῦ (*of himself*) is a *deadly* combination that signals presumptuous self-exaltation (8:53), rebellion of the highest order (19:12), and contemptuous disregard of the human/divine boundaries (10:33; 19:7). The only time Jesus uses the combination is negatively—ἀφ' ἑαυτοῦ οὐδεν (5:19), ἀπ' ἐμουτοῦ οὐδὲν (5:30), and ἀπ' ἐμουτοῦ ... οὐδὲν (8:28)—to deny that he makes anything of himself. On the basis of the verb ποιεῖν (*to make*) and reflexive pronoun ἑαυτοῦ (*of himself*) combination in FG, we can see that the issue of blasphemy is in view here. The *Jews* are concerned about arrogant self-promotion, rebellion against authority, and grasping for divine honor and divine prerogatives, all elements of our composite portrait of blasphemy (see chapter 12). In Jn 5:19-30, Jesus responds to the charge point-for-point: he attributes nothing to himself (5:19a, 30a), he does what God shows him and tells him (5:19b, 30b), he seeks not his own will but God's (5:30c); indeed, he does not seize power, but only exercises the authority given to him by God (5:22, 26-27).

This option (exemplified by Meeks, Neyrey, and Ashton) is persuasive. It affirms elements of option one (*the Jews* misunderstood Jesus to be exalting himself) and option two (FG claims Jesus' equality with God). Admittedly, option three is subtle,

but that should not put us off, since the author of FG was a master of innuendo, irony, and metaphor.[878] Therfore, as a preliminary conclusion, we contend that Jn 5:16-30 depicts the Johannine Jesus announcing that as his Father works continually, so he works continually, even on the Sabbath (5:16-17). On hearing this, *the Jews* believe that Jesus is exalting himself and claiming what belongs to God alone. The Johannine Jesus rejects the first assumption (5:19a, 30), but affirms the second—he is ἴσος τῷ θεῷ (*equal with God*) precisely because his work is in continuity with that of the Father (5:17b, 19b-29).

13.4 How is the claim that Jesus is *equal with God* qualified?

The foregoing argument indicates that the author of FG and by extension Johannine community spoke of Jesus as ἴσος τῷ θεῷ, but that is not the end of the story. By the structure of the passage, it is apparent that the Johannine Jesus clarifies or qualifies what is said in 5:18 with a monologue extending from 5:19 to 5:47. As McGrath states, "There is much to support the conclusion that the whole passage (John 5.19-47) represents one of the clearest examples in John the Evangelist engaging in legitimation, in the defense of his community's beliefs about Jesus."[879] In what follows, then, we will attempt to answer how the author of FG wants readers to understand the claim that Jesus was ἴσος τῷ θεῷ (*equal with God*) and how a first-century Jewish audience might have interpreted the claim. We will approach the text from several different angles or contexts, including (1) the *intra-textual context,* (2) the *intertextual context,* and (3) the *socio-cultural context.*

13.4.1 Intratextual context: Endowed equality with God

In response to the charges voiced in 5:18, it is apparent that Jesus does not directly respond to the accusation that *he broke or loosed the Sabbath*, but only to the accusation that he *made himself equal with God.*

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[878] The work of Culpepper (1983) is a benchmark for literary analysis of FG which, among other literary concerns, spotlights its use of figurative language. In addition, Duke (1985) and O'Day (1986) have contributed volumes on irony and Koester (1995) on symbolism in FG.

[879] McGrath (2001) 80-81.

First, Jesus denies the charge that he *made himself* something (ἑαυτὸν ποιῶν) (5:18d), that he exalted himself or sought his own glory, by using the same verb, *to do* or *to make* (ποιεῖν) and the same reflexive pronoun (ἑαυτὸν) throughout 5:19-30. Jesus begins his response by stating, "the Son is not able *to make* anything *of himself*" (ποιεῖν ἀφ' ἑμαυτοῦ) (5:19), and ends his response with the reiteration, "I am not able *to do* anything *of myself*" (ποιεῖν ἀπ' ἐμαυτοῦ) (5:30). In between, the reflexive pronoun is picked up again in 5:26. Here Jesus claims to have life *in himself* (ἐν ἑαυτῷ), but it is because the Father has life *in himself* (ἐν ἑαυτῷ) and has given it to the Son. All three uses of the reflexive pronoun stress Jesus' *dependence* on the Father and function as an emphatic denial that he is claiming to be *independent* from God or some sort of rival to God. In the midst of claiming absolute dependence on the Father, as we have seen, Jesus also claims *to do* (ποιεῖν) precisely what the Father *is doing* (ποιοιοῦντα).

- Jesus *does* (ποιεῖ) whatever he sees the Father *doing* (ποιοῦντα) (5:19)
- Everything the Father *does* (ποιεῖ) is shown to the Son (5:20)
- As the Father gives life (ζῳοποιεῖ), the Son gives life (ζῳοποιεῖ) (5:21)
- The Father gave the Son authority *to make judgment* (κρίσιν ποιεῖν) (5:27)

Second, Jesus admits to the charge of being *equal with God* (ἴσος τῷ θεῷ) in a qualified sense. As we previously noted, Jesus' response in 5:19-30, as a whole, parallels his response to the charge of Sabbath violation in 5:17, where he said, "My Father is still working, *and I* (κἀγὼ) also am working" (5:17). As we argued earlier, this showed continuity between the Father's working and the Son's working, expressed by κἀγὼ in 5:17. This continuity or harmony between Father and Son is again picked up and thoroughly recapitulated in 5:19-30:

- Whatever the Father does, *likewise* (ὁμοίως) the Son does (19)
- The Son does only what the Father shows him; the Father shows the Son everything (20-21)
- *Just as* (ὥσπερ) the Father raises the dead, *so also* (οὕτως καὶ) the Son gives life (21)
- *As* (καθὼς) the Father is honored, *so* (ἵνα) the son should be honored, (23)
- *Just as* (ὥσπερ) the Father has life in Himself, *so also* (οὕτως καὶ) the Son (26)
- The Son only judges *as* (καθὼς) he hears the Father (30)

In this way, the relationship between the Father and the Son—highlighted by the use of the comparative adverbs *just as* (ὥσπερ) .... *so also* (οὕτως καὶ)—could be characterized as one of *continuity*, *mutuality*, *unity*, and *imitation*. Here, one suspects

that the author has allowed the message and the medium to become one in that the symmetry of the chaistic structure of 5:19-30 mirrors the mutuality of the Father and Son's work. So, on the one hand, the relationship is *equal*. The Father and Son share the work equally, and there is no limit to the sharing of work because the Son does whatever the Father does and shows him (5:19, 30), which is everything (5:20). On the other hand, the relationship is *not equal*. The Son is dependent (5:19, 30) and always in the receiving position (5:22, 26, 27). Even when the Son exercises judgment *alone*, it is because the Father has granted the authority to the Son (5:22).

To sum up, an *intratextual* analysis of 5:19-30 depicts the Johannine Jesus having *endowed equality with God*, nested within a dependent relationship with the Father. This is not surprising, of course, given the oneness motif elsewhere in FG (e.g., 7:29, 8:19; 10:30, 38; 14:7, 9-11; 17:21, 23).[880]

13.4.2 Intertextual context: The apocalyptic Son of Man

The *symmetry* between the Father and Son's relationship in 5:19-30 is conspicuous. However, there is an equally conspicuous *asymmetry*: "The Father judges no one but has given all judgment to the Son" (5:22) and this grant of authority is "because (ὅτι) he is the Son of Man" (5:27b). Because of the widespread use of *(the) Son of Man* in early Jewish literature, it is important to discern how the *intertextual* environment might have influenced the writing or reading of Jn 5:19-30, particularly regarding *(the) Son of Man* in 5:27.

The enormous complexities surrounding the use of the term *Son of Man* are only surpassed by the countless theories that litter the graveyards of scholarship meant to address such complexities.[881] However, there is some agreement on a few issues regarding FG. For example, the thirteen references to *(the) Son of Man* in FG[882] are used self-referentially and as a title by the Johannine Jesus.[883] Even the unique use of

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[880] On the oneness motif in FG, see Appold (1976) *passim*, esp. 18-34.

[881] See the recent reviews by Hare (1990) 1-27; Burkett (1991) 20-37; Nickelsburg (1992) 4.137-50; Caragounis (1986) 9-33.

[882] 1:51; 3:13, 14; 5:27; 6:27, 53, 62; 8:28; 9:35; 12:23, 34 (twice); 13:31.

[883] So Burkett (1991) 16.

the anarthrous form, υἱὸς ἀνθρώπου (*Son of Man*),[884] in Jn 5:27 should be understood as a title,[885] though it probably stresses quality rather than identity.[886] As with the Synoptic Gospels, FG uses *(the) Son of Man* in reference to the future judgment by Jesus, his humanity, and his death. However, in distinction from the Synoptics, there are hints that the author of FG encouraged an interpretation of *(the) Son of Man* in accord with certain, primarily apocalyptic, traditions.

(1) The manifestation of Yahweh's glory. Although there are many possible traditions that might have influenced the writing or the reading of FG use of *(the) Son of Man*,[887] recent scholarship has emphasized the influence of apocalyptic and Merkabah traditions.[888] Such traditions are characterized by manifestations or visions of YHWH's glory,[889] a theme that is associated with *(the) Son of Man* throughout FG (e.g., 12:23; 13:31). Within FG, the verb ὑψόω (*to lift up*) is used three times and each time it is associated with *the Son of Man* in the double-sense of being *lifted up*

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[884] Of the 85 occurrences of *(the) Son of Man* in the NT, ὁ υἱος τοῦ ἀνθρωποῦ occurs 83 times and υἱὸς ἀνθρώπου occurs twice (Jn 5:27 and Heb 2:6).

[885] So Bultmann (1971) 260-61; Bernard (1928) 1.244; Brown (1966) 1.220; Barrett (1978) 262; Hare (1990) 96; Ashton (1991) 362.

[886] So Hare (1990) 92-3, 96; Moloney (1976) 82 writes, "It appears that 'Son of Man' (5:27) in its present context is definite, i.e., titular, but it may well retain a 'qualitative' sense."

[887] Burkett (1991) 20-37 organizes the various traditions and approaches into three categories: (1) *Jewish apocalyptic traditions*, such as Daniel 7, *1 Enoch*, and 4 *Ezra* 13. (2) *Non-apocalyptic traditions*, such as the *Son of Man* in Ezekiel; Bultmann's Gnostic Redeemer; Borsch's Primal Man-King; Lindars's understanding of *bar (e)nasha*; Abel in *T. Abr.* 12-13; and Burkett's theory regarding Prov 20:1-4. (3) *Modified Apocalyptic traditions*, such as Iber's theory that a Gnostic myth was added to Jewish apocalyptic thought; Dodd's theory, which combines Synoptic material with the hermetic tractate *Poimandres*; Talbert's theory that a Synoptic-type *Son of Man* overlapped with Hellenistic descent/ascent myths; theories drawing on Philo's heavenly man speculation; and theories combining apocalyptic *Son of Man* imagery with personified Wisdom.

[888] Regarding apocalyptic trends in FG, Ashton (1991) 381-406 argues that an apocalyptic worldview is governed by the urgent conviction that God intervenes in human history and, by His initiative, reveals the heavenly blueprint to a seer or prophet in extraordinary ways, not least of which is through manifestation of His glory. In FG, Ashton finds several "intimations of apocalyptic," including: (1) the two-ages or stages of revelation, (2) visions and dreams, (3) riddles for insiders and outsiders, (4) the correspondence between above and below.

Regarding Merkabah trends in FG, Kanagaraj (1998) 312-17 identifies eleven aspects of first-century Jewish mysticism (primarily Merkabah mysticism) in John, including (1) heavenly ascents, (2) *seeing* God on a chariot-throne (reinterpreted by John using δόζα and δοζάξω), (3) visions of fire and light, (4) angelic mediation (ascribed to Jesus by FG), (5) visions of a human-like figure, the angelomorphic *Son of Man* who represents God as His Agent, (6) salvation and judgment, (7) personal transformation, (8) divine commissioning, (9) the identification of δόζα with the Name of God, (10) communal mysticism, and (11) esoteric features (like irony, symbols, signs, and misunderstanding) that point to an ultimate reality beyond the world of appearance. Others who have linked FG and Merkabah mysticism include: Odeberg (1968 [1929]) 72ff., Meeks (1986) 141-73, Borgen (1986) 67-78, esp. 73, and Dunn (1998 [1983]) 345-75, esp. 359.

(on the cross) and being *exalted (in glory)*.[890] For those initiated into the secrets of the Johannine community, the *lifting up* motif was apparently an invitation to see Jesus' death, not as humiliation, but as the very moment of his kingly glorification (3:14; 8:28; 12:34).[891] Dahl and Kanagaraj argue that this understanding of δόξα (*glory*) goes beyond recalling the manifestation of God's glory at Sinai.[892] It also alludes to a vision of YHWH's glory *seen* in the form of a human sitting on the heavenly throne, a vision that is echoed by Merkabah texts based on Ezek 1:26-28 and Isa 6:1-5.[893] The idea of a human sitting on the throne of glory[894] becomes explicit in FG when Isaiah's vision of YHWH's glory in Isa 6:1-5 is interpreted as a vision of Christ himself in Jn 12:41. What is more, FG links this vision of the glorified Christ with the Suffering Servant of Second Isaiah (Jn 12:38; cf. Isa 53:1). Hence, it is not surprising to find that the verbs *to glorify* (δοξάζω) and *to lift up* (ὑψόω) associated with *(the) Son of Man* in FG are also associated with the Suffering Servant in Second Isaiah (LXX Isa 52:13-14).[895] However, FG introduces a significant restriction on visions of God's glory—"no one has seen God,"[896] but "we have seen his glory."[897] For the Johannine community, a vision of YHWH's glory *was only be seen* by them in the suffering of the *Son of Man* lifted up (exalted) on the cross (Jn 3:13-14). This brings us to an important point: FG's proclamation of *(the) Son of Man* as a manifestation of God's glory appears to have a sharp polemical edge

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[889] Kanagaraj (1998) 81, 125-26; Ashton (1991) 383-406.

[890] This motif is recognized by most major commentators; e.g., Meeks (1986) 155-57; Moloney (1998) 95.

[891] Culpepper (1983) 159 highlights how ὑψόω is part of the *misunderstandings motif* and plays a role in the *implicit commentary* of FG. Bultmann (1971) 350 writes, "Yet they [*the Jews*] do not suspect that by 'lifting him up' they themselves make him their judge. The double-meaning of 'lifting up' is obvious. They lift up Jesus by crucifying him; but it is precisely through his crucifixion that he is lifted up to his heavenly glory as the Son of Man. At the very moment when they think that they are passing judgement on him, he becomes their judge."

[892] Dahl (1986) 128-29; Kanagaraj (1998) 219-46, esp. 224-26.

[893] The goal of the Merkabah mystic was to enter into an experience (vision or dream) of the Throne of Glory (*Hekhalot Rabbati* 22.2; *Synopse* §§ 236, 248) and *to see* the King, on his Throne (*Hekhalot Rabbati* 15.1; *Synopse* § 198); see Kanagaraj (1998) 81.

[894] McGrath (2001) 96-98 provides an interesting discussion regarding the tradition that God would appoint a human being to judge humanity (cf. *T. Abr.* A 13:3; Acts 17:31; Heb 2:17, 4:15-16).

[895] E.g., LXX Isa 52:13-14; see the comments by Lincoln (2000) 45 and our comments in § 3.3. The connection between suffering and exaltation is found in the Wisdom of Solomon, where the *righteous one* is *persecuted* and then *exalted*, and where the *righteous one is God's son* (ἐστιν ὁ δίκαιος υἱός θεοῦ) and *boasts that God is his father* (ἀλοζονεύεται πατέρα θεόν) (Wis 2:16-18).

[896] Jn 1:18; cf. 5:37; 6:46.

[897] Jn 1:14; cf. 12:41; 14:9.

directed against Jewish mystics,[898] who may have claimed visions of divine glory, or against Jewish traditions that exalted patriarchs and prophets, who were said to have mystical visions and revelations.[899]

(2) **The descent/ascent of a heavenly mediator.** Apocalyptic and Merkabah traditions also refer to supernatural figures descending and ascending from heaven. Similarly, FG links *(the) Son of Man* with a decent/ascent motif. The promise by the Johannine Jesus that "you will see heaven opened and the angels of God ascending and descending upon the Son of Man'" (Jn 1:51; NRSV) resonates with descriptions of descents and ascents of heavenly figures in apocalyptic traditions. For instance, in the *Testament of Abraham* (Recension A), Isaac recounts one of his dreams and states that "I saw the *heaven opened* and I saw a luminous man *descending* from heaven, shining more than seven suns. And this man of the sunlike form came and took the sun from my head and *went back up into the heavens* from which he had descended" (*T. Ab.*A7:3-4; our italics).[900] Admittedly, one could find dissimilarities between FG and *the Testament of Abraham*, but there are obvious family resemblances. As Talbert has shown, heavenly revelation, heavenly figures, and *ascents and descents* from heaven are common in Jewish angelogical traditions, from the angel-messenger (מלאך) in the OT, who is almost fused with Yahweh, to various archangels who appear as redemptive figures in first-century apocalyptic literature.[901] "There existed a mythology with a descent-ascent pattern, in which the redeemer figure descends, takes human form, and then ascends back to heaven after or in connection with a saying activity."[902] FG shares this mythology or symbolic universe with apocalyptic and Merkabah traditions.

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[898] See Morray-Jones (1992) 1 who argues that "the talmudic references to *ma'aśeh merkabah* indicate the existence of an esoteric tradition or traditions within first-and second- century rabbinism. These traditions were associated with exegesis of Scriptural accounts of visions of the enthroned deity (Daniel 7, Isaiah 6 and, pre-eminently, Ezekiel 1) but it is probable that visionary-mystical practices were also involved."

[899] Kanagaraj (1998) 226. See also Meeks (1986) 147 and 153.

[900] The translation is from M. E. Stone (1972) 16-17.

[901] Talbert (1975/6) 422-26 describes the ascent/descent of archangels in Tobit, *Joseph and Aseneth, Testament of Job,* the *Apocalypse of Moses,* the *Testament of Abraham,* and *the Prayer of Joseph.*

[902] Talbert (1975/76) 426; cf. Ashton (1991) 352 who largely agrees with Talbert.

(3) Moses traditions. When the Johannine Jesus contends that "No one has ascended into heaven except the one who descended from heaven, the Son of Man" (Jn 3:13; NRSV), it brings to mind claims made on behalf of Moses. Borgen and Meeks explain the Johannine ascent/descent motif in relation to traditions about Moses who, not only climbed Mount Sinai to receive the law, but also ascended into heaven itself.[903] In Philo's account of the ascent, Moses enters into heaven, sees what is invisible to human eyes, has communion (κοινωνίας) with the Father and Maker of the universe, is *named ... God and King* (ὠνομάσθη ... θεὸς καὶ βασιλεύς), and then returns as a model (παράδειγμα) for mortals to imitate (*Mos.* 1.157-158). Thus, Moses becomes the divine mediator of God *par excellence,* bringing heavenly secrets to humanity and recovering the lost image of God.[904] A vivid rendition of this tradition is found in *Ezekiel the Tragedian* written probably in the second century B.C.[905] The drama describes a dream of Moses where, after climbing Mount Sinai, he sees a great throne touching heaven. Sitting on the throne is *a man,* who gives Moses his scepter and crown, and invites Moses to sit on his throne, whereupon heavenly bodies parade before him in worship (*Ezek. Trag.* 68-82). An interpretation of the dream immediately follows, which reveals that God has granted Moses two great powers, the authority to judge and to lead mortals on earth (*Ezek. Trag* 83-89). As Borgen and Meeks point out,[906] when these types of Mosaic traditions are compared with the Johannine claim that "No one has ascended into heaven except the one who descended from heaven, the Son of Man," it appears as though the Johannine group emphatically denied that Moses (or anyone else) had ever made such a journey. When compared to Moses' ascent, Jesus "represents the reverse phenomenon of descent from heaven and subsequent exaltation."[907] Given the abundance of references and allusions to Moses in FG,[908] it is likely that FG witnesses to a conflict

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[903] The primary biblical text is Exod 34:29 (cf. 2 Cor 3:14-16). Borgen (1977) 243-58 cites Philo's *Mos.* 1.158f; Josephus' *A.J.* 3.96; *L.A.B.* [Ps.-Philo] 12:1; Rev. 4:1 and a number of Rabbinic references. Meeks (1967) *passim* cites texts from Philo, Josephus, Rabbinic Haggada, Samaritan sources, and Mandaean sources.

[904] Cf. the discussion in Meeks (1976) 43-67, esp. 46-48, and Meeks (1968) 354-71. Philo calls Moses *God* and *King*, which may have been influenced by his reading of Exod 4:16, where Moses is said to be god to Aaron, or Exod 7:1, where Moses is made god over Pharaoh.

[905] van der Horst (1983) 21-29; cf. *OTP* 2.803-19.

[906] Meeks (1967) 297-301; Borgen (1977) 243f.

[907] Borgen (1977) 245.

[908] Meeks (1967) *passim.*

between two rival groups within the synagogue. One group claimed to be the disciples of Moses; the other, disciples of Jesus, the Son of Man (Jn 9:28-29, 35-37).

Taking both the apocalyptic/Merkabah and Mosaic traditions into consideration, Ashton argues that within the *son of man* motif in FG there is "a *fusion of two mythological patterns,* one angelic, starting in heaven (stressed by Talbert), the other mystical, starting from earth (stressed by Borgen)."[909] In early Judaism, the two patterns—the descent of an angelic figure and the ascent of a human being—could exist, even side-by-side, as the angel Michael and Abraham do in the *Testament of Abraham,* without threat to Jewish sensibilities. However, the fusion of the two patterns, as we find in FG, had consequences that Judaism could not contain. As Ashton writes:

> Taken separately neither pattern presented any threat: the blending of the two meant a new religion. The conviction that the heavenly being was human and the human being heavenly was the conceptual hub round which the huge wheel of christian theology would revolve for centuries to come.[910]

(4) A glorious human-like figure. Apocalyptic and Merkabah traditions refer to the appearance of a glorious *human-like figure* or *Son of Man,*[911] a figure that is invariably traced to Daniel 7.[912] For example, VanderKam argues that Daniel 7 undoubtedly influenced the *Similitudes* and its use of the term *son of man* (Dan 7:13; *1 En. 46:2-4*), its depiction of the *head of days* (Dan 7:13b; *1 En.* 46:1), and its portrayal of the afflicted (Dan 7:24-25; *1 En.* 46:2-8).[913] VanderKam also points out several ways in which the *Similitudes* develop and transform Daniel's conceptuality, including making explicit what was only implicit in Daniel 7, namely, that "the son of man is definitely the judge in the eschatological courtroom."[914] VanderKam has also shown that the *Similitudes* bring two prominent designations, *son of man* (from

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[909] Ashton (1991) 355.

[910] Ashton (1991) 355.

[911] E.g., Ezek 1:26-28; 8:2; LXX Dan 7:9, 13-14; 10:5-6; *Apoc. Abr.* 10; *1 Enoch* 46:1-3; 48:2-7; 49:2-4; 51:3; 62:5-7; 69:29; 71:11, 14; 4 *Ezra* 13; *Acs. Isa.* 9:6-18; Rev 1:13, 17; cf. Rev 1:8 and 22:13.

[912] With respect to the use of *the son of man* in the *Similitudes* and 4 Ezra 13, J. J. Collins (1992) 448-66 argues for a Danielic origin. With respect to FG, Ashton (1991) 340 states that "the remote origin of all the sayings is the Danielic Son of Man."

[913] VanderKam (1992) 188. See Nickelsburg (1992) 6.138-39 for ways in which *1 Enoch* 37-71 developed and transformed the Danielic traditions.

[914] VanderKam (1992) 188.

Daniel 7) and *chosen one* (from Second Isaiah), to refer to the same exalted being, who is closely associated with God, the future judgment of the nations, and the vindication of the suffering saints.[915] The *Son of Man* is the great eschatological judge, who sits next to God (*1 En.* 45:3; 46:1-3; 51:3; 61:8: 62:2-6; 70:27; 71:1-17). VanderKam's analysis highlights the type of mythological environment in which the Johannine group would have understood the term *son of man*.

Like the *Similitudes*, there are substantial points of comparison between the Danielic *son of man* and FG's use of the term. Although some have denied such a connection,[916] the following observations indicate otherwise. The Danielic *son of man* and *(the) Son of Man* Jn 5:27 have at least four striking similarities. First, the anarthrous use of υἱὸς ἀνθρώπου (*son of man*) in Jn 5:27 parallels the anarthrous ὡς υἱὸς ἀνθρώου (*like son of man*) in LXX Dan 7:13. Second, the phrase ἐξουσίαν ἔδωκεν αὐτῷ (*he gave authority/power to him*) in Jn 5:27 parallels ἐδόθη αὐτῷ ἐξουσία (*authority/power was given to him*) in LXX Dan 7:14a.[917] Third, the authority of υἱὸς ἀνθρώπου (*son of man*) to judge in Jn 5:27 is similar to the judgment by the *Ancient of Days* in Dan 7:22, since the *Ancient of Days* was identified as υἱὸς ἀνθρώπου (*son of man*) in some LXX manuscripts.[918] Fourth, Daniel 7 presents a heavenly duo; a senior one described as *the Ancient of Days* and a second one described as *like a son of man*. They are placed in close juxtaposition—both are directly compared to each other with the use of ὡς (Dan 7:13), both are identified as the one coming (Dan 7:13, 22), both are worshipped (Dan 7:13-14). And

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[915] VanderKam (1992) 169-91 argues that the *Similitudes* also use the terms *a righteous one* and *an anointed one* to refer to that being, but only *son of man* and *chosen one* are prominent.

[916] Hare (1990) 92 notes that Higgins and Borsch have challenged the idea that FG was influenced by Dan 7:13 on the grounds that FG is nonapocalyptic in nature. However, Ashton (1991) 383-406 argues that while not an apocalypse, FG shares apoclayptic elements in several ways. Even if FG were judged to be nonapocalyptic, it does not rule out that FG could have adopted the use of *Son of Man* from Jewish or Christian traditions that were in the air (e.g., *1 Enoch* 37-71, *4 Ezra* 13) or even from Daniel 7 itself.

[917] θ′ Dan 7:14a has αὐτῷ ἐδόθη ἡ ἀρχὴ καὶ ἡ τιμὴ καὶ βασιλεία (*rule, honor, and dominion were given to him*), which also reflects ideas present in Jn 5:22-23 and 27.

[918] See Stuckenbruck (1995) 268-76. The OG Dan 7:13 has ἰδοὺ ἐπὶ τῶν νεφελῶν τοῦ οὐρανοῦ ὡς υἱὸς ἀνθρώπου ἤρχετο, καὶ ὡς παλαιὸς ἡμερῶν παρῆν (*Behold, on the clouds of heaven [one] like a son of man was coming, and he was present <u>like</u> the Ancient of Days*). See Rahlfs' OG LXX, which follows Codex Chisianus 88, Syro-Hexapla, and Papyrus 967.

In contrast, θ′ Dan 7:13 has ἰδοὺ μετὰ τῶν νεφελῶν τοῦ οὐρανοῦ ὡς υἱὸς ἀνθρώπου ἐρχόμενος ἦ καὶ ἕως τοῦ παλαιοῦ τῶν ἡμερῶν ἔφθασεν καὶ ἐνώπιον αὐτοῦ προσήέχθη (*Behold, with the clouds of heaven [one] like a son of man was coming and he came <u>to</u> the Ancient of Days.*). See Rahlf's θ′ LXX for Daniel, which follows Codicies A and B.

this is expressed in the context of vigorous monotheism (Dan 3:18; 6:26-27). Like Daniel 7, Jn 5:19-30 also presents a supreme duo; a senior one described as *Father* and a second one described as *Son/Son of Man.* They are placed in close juxtaposition—both are compared to one another with the construction ὥσπερ ... καὶ (5:21, 26), both are identified as giving life (5:21, 25, 28-29), both are to be honored equally (5:23). And, like Daniel 7, this is expressed in the context of μόνος θεός commitments (5:44; 17:3).

If we grant that there are enough similarities between Daniel 7 and Jn 5:27 to posit a that the Johannine *Son of Man* has Danielic overtones, we still need to consider what type of figure would have been evoked by Jn 5:27 for first-century Jews. Although there is a great deal of debate about who (or what) is referred to by the use of the *Son of Man*, Chrys Caragounis and John Collins have independently provided cogent and mutually supportive argumentation in this regard.[919] Part of Caragounis' study on the *Son of Man* involves a detailed analysis of Daniel 7. Based on philological considerations, a comparison of the rule of the beasts and that of the *son of man*, the characteristics of the *son of man,* and the identity of the *son of man*,[920] Caragounis concludes that the Danielic *son of man* "is conceived not as a symbol for the pious Jews, but as a pre-existent, heavenly Being, who appears as the leader of the saints."[921] The Danielic *son of man* has "the honors and powers normally predicated of God, and is ... identified with the *'Elyônîn*," a Figure who is distinguished from the Most High (the Ancient of Days or God) and who functions as the Vindicator and Leader of God's people and as the Agent of God's Kingdom.[922] In an independent study, Collins focuses on Daniel 7, the *Similitudes*, and 4 *Ezra* in an attempt to discern common assumptions regarding the *Son of Man* during the first-century C.E. He concludes that "Daniel 7 remains the source of Jewish expectation of an apocalyptic Son of Man," but, by the first century CE, "there were some common assumptions about the figure in Daniel's vision that go beyond what is explicit in the biblical text."[923] By the first-century, the *Similitudes* and 4 *Ezra* both agree that the

[919] Caragounis (1986) and Collins (1992).
[920] Caragounis (1986) 61-80.
[921] Caragounis (1986) 188-89 (cf. 61-81).
[922] Caragounis (1986) 81.
[923] Collins (1992) 449.

Son of Man refers to (1) an individual and not a collective symbol, (2) the messiah, (3) a pre-existent, transcendent figure of heavenly origin, and (4) possibly the Isaianic Servant of the Lord, but without the connotation of a *suffering* servant.[924] Together, Caragounis and Collins' works suggest that the use of *(the) Son of Man* in Jn 5:27 could have evoked very similar notions about the Johannine Jesus, a pre-existent heavenly Agent or Messiah who exercises the authority of God.

(5) God's two powers. As we have seen, there was a wide spectrum of divine duties or functions associated with *(the) Son of Man* in early Jewish literature. Jn 5:19-30 focuses only on two functions, the creative and judging powers of God. This is emphasized by the chaistic structure of Jn 5:19-30, centering on verses 21-27and the two great powers that the Father has given to the Son—giving life and judging.[925]

Life/Judgment: The Father gives life, so also the Son (21-22)
The Son is given all judgment so that *all may honor him* (23)

Hearing/Life: The one hearing and believing has life (24)
Hearing/Life: The dead will hear and have life (25)
The Father has life in himself, so also the Son (26)

Life/Judgment: The Son has authority to judge, because *he is Son of Man* (27)

Jewish tradition often refers to God as both *merciful* and *just*, attributes representing God's creative power and his judging or ruling power respectively.[926] In this regard, both Philo and the Rabbis held that there were two great powers or *measures* (*middoth*) of God.[927]

According to Philo, people cannot see God, but they can *know* God through what he does in the world, through His *creative power* (δυνάμις ποιητική) and in His *ruling power* (δυνάμις βασιλική).[928] All aspects of God's power are represented by the two powers, which were sometimes referred to as the *two hands of God.*[929] On the one hand, δυνάμεις ποιητική includes goodness, kindness, beneficence, and creative power; on the other hand, God's δυνάμεις βασιλική includes sovereignty,

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[924] Collins (1992) 464-65.
[925] In this section, we are following the work of Dodd (1953) 320-28 and Neyrey (1988) 25-29.
[926] E.g., Exod 34:5-6; see Urbach (1979) 48ff.
[927] Dahl and Segal (1978) 1 and 4 n. 11.
[928] Neyrey (1988) 25.

authority, governing power, punitive power, and ruling power.[930] Moreover, Philo presents the two powers as flowing out of the figure of the Logos. In *Fug.* 100-101, Philo describes the two powers of God, first in terms of the ark and the two cherubim and then in terms of a chariot and its charioteer.

> (100) ... the **creative power** and the **kingly power** are the winged Cherubim which are placed upon it [the ark]. (101) The Divine Word, Who is above these ... He is Himself the Image of God ... placed nearest, with no intervening distance, to the only truly existent One... The Word is the charioteer of the Powers, and He Who talks is seated in the chariot, giving directions to the charioteer for the right wielding of the reins of the Universe. (*Fug.* 100b-101)[931]
>
> (100) ... ποιητικῆς δὲ καὶ βασιλικῆς τὰ ὑπόπτερα καὶ ἐφιδρυμένα Χερουβίη· (100) ὁ δ' ὑπεράνω τούτων λόγος θεῖος ... αὐτὸς εἰκών ὑπάρχων θεοῦ, τῶν νοητῶν ἅπαξ ἁπάντων ὁ πρεσβύτατος, ὁ ἐγγυτάτω, μηδενὸς ὄντος μεθορίου διαστήματος, τοῦ μόνου, ὃ ἔστιν ἀψευδῶς, ἀφιδρυμένος ... ἡνίοχον μέν εἶναι τῶν δυνάμεων τὸν λόγον, ἔποχον δὲ τὸν λαλοῦντα, ἐπικελευόμενον τῷ ἡνιόχῳ τὰ πρὸς ὀρθὴν τοῦ παντὸς ἡνιόχησιν. (*Fug.* 100b-101; Loeb)

Here, the two powers (the cherubim) are controlled by the Logos (the charioteer), who is inseparable and yet distinct from God who, in turn, sits in the chariot and gives instructions to the charioteer (the Logos). When Philo speaks about the two powers, perhaps on the basis of wider tradition, he gives them exalted titles—the creative and merciful power is identified as *Theos* (θεός) and the ruling or judging power is called *Lord* (κύριος).[932] Take, for example, Philo's statement in *Mos.* 2.99:

> I should myself say that they [the cherubim] are allegorical representations of the two most august and highest potencies of Him that is, the creative and the kingly. His **creative** potency is called **God**, because through it He placed and made and ordered this universe, and the **kingly** is called **Lord**, being that with which He governs what has come into being and rules it steadfastly with justice. (*Mos.* 2.99; Loeb; our underlines)
>
> ἐγὼ δ' ἂν εἴποιμι δηλοῦσθαι δι' ὑπονοιῶν τὰς πρεσβυτάτας καὶ ἀνωτάτω δύο τοῦ ὄντος δυνάμεις, τήν τε ποιητικὴν καὶ βασιλικήν· ὀνομάζεται δ' **ἡ μὲν ποιητικὴ** δύναμις αὐτοῦ **θεός**, καθ' ἣν ἔθηκε καὶ ἐποίησε καὶ διεκόσμησε τόδε τὸ πᾶν, ἡ δὲ **βασιλικὴ κύριος**, ᾗ τῶν γενομένων ἄρχει καὶ σὺν δίκῃ βεβαίως ἐπικρατεῖ. (*Mos.* 2.99; Loeb; our underlines)

Similarly, the Rabbis taught that *Elohim* (אלהים) was used in scripture whenever God's justice was emphasized and the tetragrammaton, *YHWH* (יהוה), whenever

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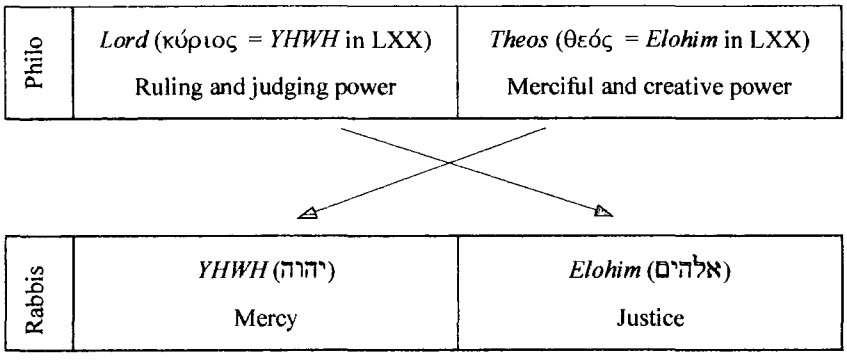
[929] *Deus* 73; *Somn.* 2.265; *Plant.* 50.
[930] See the evidence provided by Neyrey (1988) 25.
[931] Our translation conflates Colson's and Yonge's.
[932] E.g., *Mos.* 2.99; *Plant.* 86; *Migr.* 182; *Somn.* 1.159.

God's mercy was understood.[933] As Dahl and Segal point out, Philo and the rabbis *reverse* the names and the powers,[934] but the underlying conceptuality is similar.[935]



Despite reversals, both the Rabbis and Philo agree that the *two measures* of mercy and judgment are not in contrast, but complementary, and that *fear* and *love* are the two complimentary ways in which people should relate to God.[936] The importance of properly conceptualizing the two measures of God is emphasized by a well-known tradition found in *b. Ḥag.* 14a. In this tradition, R. Akiba drew the inference from Dan 7:19 that there were *two powers [God and the Messiah] in heaven*!

כתוב אחד אומר (דניאל ז') כרסיה שביין דנור וכתוב אחד אומר (דניאל ז') עד די כרסון רמיו ועתיק יומין יתב! - לא קשיא: אחד לו ואחד לדוד. כדתניא: אחד לו ואחד לדוד, דברי רבי עקיבא. אמר לו רבי יוסי הגלילי: עקיבא! עד מתי אתה עושה שכינה חול! אלא: אחד לדין ואחד לצדקה. קיבלה מיניה או לא קיבלה מיניה? - תא שמע: אחד לדין ואחד לצדקה, דברי רבי עקיבא.

(*b. Ḥag.* 14a [15b-19a])

One pasage says: His throne was fiery flames; (16) and another Passage says: Till thrones were placed, and One that was ancient of days did sit! (17) — There is no contradiction: one [throne] for Him, and one for David; this is the view of R. Akiba. Said R. Jose the Galilean to him: Akiba, how long wilt thou treat the Divine Presence as profane! (18) Rather, [it must mean], one for justice and one for grace. (19) Did he accept [this explanation] from him, or did he not accept it? — Come and hear: One for justice and one for grace; this is the view of R. Akiba.[937]

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[933] Dahl and Segal (1978) 1; Urbach (1979) 448-61, esp. 451, where he cites *Sipre Deut.* 27; *Mek. R. Ishmael, Shira* 4; *Mek. R. Simeon b. Yaḥai; Sipre Deut.* 27; *Sipra, ʾAḥare*, ix, 85c: "'I am the Lord your God'—I am the Lord who spoke and the world came into being; I am Judge; I am full of compassion."

[934] Urbach (1979) 452-93 argues that Philo reversed the Palestinian tradition because he was influenced by the LXX, which substituted *Lord* (κύριος) for *YHWH* (יהוה), and then Philo treated the word κύριος in its accepted sense. Even so, Segal (1999) 83 notes that Philo's designations are followed by *Mek.* R. Ishmael, Shirta 4, which means that Philo is not alone in his designations.

[935] Dahl and Segal (1978) 1.

[936] Dahl and Segal (1978) 9, 11.

[937] The Hebrew and English of *b. Ḥag.* 14a, 15b-19a are from the Soncino CD-ROM Classics Collection.

In this account, R. Akiba and R. Jose are discussing the apparent contradiction in Dan 7:9. On the one hand, thrones (plural) are set; on the other, only the Ancient of Days sat on a throne (singular). R. Akiba inferred that the other throne was for *one like a son of man* in Dan 7:13, which he identified as the Davidic Messiah. R. Jose was shocked and accused R. Akiba of profaning the *Divine Presence* or *Shekhina* (שכינה). After R. Jose's admonition, "R. Akiba agreed that the two thrones in heaven should symbolize the two aspects of God's providence—His mercy and His justice. God is viewed as sitting on one throne when judging mercifully and on the other when judging by strict justice."[938] Even though, as Segal contends, "no one would suggest these are Akiba's actual words," the tradition may date just beyond the first-century—since both Rabbis, Jose and Akiba, are late-second or third generation tannaim (120-140 C.E.)[939] and may reflect common concerns, thoughts, and assumptions of the late first- and early second-century Judaism.

(6) Summary. We have argued that Jn 5:19-30 provides a qualification for the Johannine claim that Jesus was *equal with God* (ἴσος τῷ θεῷ) in Jn 5:18. It is likely that the writer and earliest readers of Jn 5:19-30 would have understood that qualification in light of other early Jewish, particularly apocalyptic, traditions about *(the) Son of Man*. Against this backdrop, the claim that Jesus is equal with God is not a claim that Jesus is God. Rather, it asserts that Jesus functions as the Viceroy of God, a pre-existent heavenly being who sits next to God, has the authority of God, and is entitled to equal honor with God. Furthermore, Jesus' crucifixion on earth is the only means by which to *see* an epiphany of heavenly glory. Only Jesus is the Revealer, the only *Man* who has descended from God, able to mediate between heaven and earth. For these reasons, it is likely that the Johannine claim that *Jesus was equal with God* as *(the) Son of Man* was interpreted by non-believing Jews as an aggressive remark against those who claimed that Moses (or perhaps another mystic-

[938] Segal (1977) 48.

[939] Stemberger (1996) 57 states, "The study of extensive text units (e.g., by J. Neusner) has shown that at least in Tannaitic collections these attributions are largely reliable." Danby (1933) 799 dates Akiba and Jose the Galilean to 120-140 and Stemberger (1996) 71-72 dates Akiba with the "younger second generation of Tannaites" (ca. 90-130 C.E.).

visionary) had seen the glory of God or was able to mediate between heaven and earth.

Moreover, late first-century Jews, who were familiar with traditions similar to those of Philo and the Rabbis, would have understood Jn 5:19-30 as a claim that *Jesus exercises the two great powers of God*—the power to give life (5:21-22) and the power of eschatological judgment (5:23, 27).[940] Declaring that the Son exercised the two great powers of God clarifies in what sense the Johannine community claimed that Jesus was *equal with God.* What is more, the narrative context of chapter 5, where Jesus heals a paralytic (Jn 5:1-15), reinforces the notion that Jesus exercises the *creative* or *merciful power* of God (which Philo designated as θεός). The notion that Jesus works on the Sabbath like the Father coheres with the idea that Jesus exercises the *ruling power* of God (which Philo designated as κύριος). Admittedly, this is conjecture, and we are not suggesting that FG uses θεός and κύριος in accord with Philo's speculations,[941] but it is possible that the combined use of θεός and κύριος may have been a way for some Jews (beyond Philo and John) to refer to the totality of Divine powers in so far as humans may experience them, akin to the Rabbinic use of *YHWH* and *Elohim.*[942] It is all the more noteworthy, therefore, that in a key post-resurrection scene Thomas honors Jesus as both *Lord* (κύριος) and *God* (θεός) (20:28).

13.4.3 Socio-cultural context: God's principal agent and broker

So far, we have looked at how the *intra-textual* and *intertextual* contexts may have influenced a first-century reading of Jn 5:19-30. In this section, we continue to ask how Jn 5:19-30 qualifies Jn 5:18, but now we shift to the potential *socio-cultural* context. In the socio-cultural context of the ancient world, a predominant social value

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[940] Dodd (1953) 322.

[941] Neyrey (1988) 28; a cursory look at the 52 uses of κύριος in FG does not suggest a close connection between Jesus exercising the power of judgment and predicating the title *Lord* to him.

[942] This recalls Paul's statement that "for us there is one God, the Father, from whom are all things and for whom we exist, and one Lord, Jesus Christ, through whom are all things and through whom we exist" (1 Cor 8:6; NRSV). Paul's statement along with other NT texts has raised ongoing debate about the nature of early Jewish and Christian conceptions of monotheism. See N. T. Wright (1991) 120-6, Dunn (1991) 195-97 and Dunn (1998a) 337-39; Hurtado (1988) 97-99 and (1999) 63-97 who characterizes Christian monotheism as *binitarianism*; Bauckham (1998) 25-42 who speaks of *Christological monotheism.*

was honor. Honor was in fact a concern for the Johannine group, because the text itself raises the issue directly: "Anyone who does not honor the Son does not honor the father who sent him" (5:23b; NRSV). We will look at how, from the perspective of FG and Jewish textual traditions, Jesus is presented as "the sent one," the Agent of the Father, and how, from the perspective of patronage and kinship models, Jesus is portrayed as the Broker of the Great Benefactor.

(1) Jesus as God's Agent. Several recent studies have highlighted the role of the Johannine Jesus as God's envoy or agent.[943] First, the notion that Jesus is presented as God envoy is linked to the *sending motif* in FG.[944] As Loader has noted, on the lips of Jesus, "he who sent me," almost becomes a formal designation for the Father.[945] Jesus refers to the Father as "the one who sent me" (ὁ πέμψας με πατήρ) twenty-three times and another seventeen times ἀποσέλλω is used to refer to the Father sending the Son.[946] The sending motif is not limited to uses of πέμπω and ἀποστέλλω, but also includes references to Jesus *coming and going*,[947] *ascending and descending*,[948] and being *from God*.[949] Second, the idea that FG portrays Jesus as God's envoy is supported by at least six principles of agency in Jewish tradition.[950]

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[943] Borgen (1986) 67-78; Meeks (1976) 43-67; Bühner (1977) *passim*; Harvey (1987) 239-50; Ashton (1991) 312-17; Margaret Davies (1992) 129-32; McGrath (2001) chapter 4.

[944] Loader (1992) 29ff and 76ff.; Loader (1984) 188-216.

[945] Loader (1984) 190.

[946] Both πέμπω (e.g., 13:20; 15:21, 26; 16:7; 20:21) and ἀποστέλλω (e.g., 5:38; 7:29; 8:42; 11:42; 17:8, 18, 23, 25) are used to express the idea of the Father *sending* the Son. Loader (1992) 30 believes that, contrary to Regstorf's claim that ἀποστέλλω stresses authority and πέμπω stresses God's involvement, the two terms have the same meaning.

[947] E.g., Jn 1:9; 27, 30; 3:21, 31; 4:25; 5:43-44; 6:33, 37, 50; 7:27; 8:14, 21-22; 9:29-30; 11:27; 12:13; 13:3, 36; 14:4-5; 16:28; 17:13.

[948] E.g., Jn 1:51; 3:13; 6:62; 20:17.

[949] E.g., Jn 3:2; 6:46; 7:17; 8:40, 42; 9:16, 33; 13:3; 16:30

[950] Borgen (1986) 67-78 has identified six basic principles echoed in FG. The first principle of Jewish agency is that "an agent is like the one who sent him" (*Mek.* Exod 12:3, 6; *b. Bera* 5:5; *b. Hag.* 10b), which parallels sayings like, "He who believes in me, believes not in me but in him who sent me" (Jn 12:44; cf. 13:20; 14:9; 15:23). The second principle echoed in FG is that the agent is subordinate to the sender (*Gen. Rab.* 78; cf. Jn 13:16). The third principle is that the agent carries out the mission of the sender (*b. Qid.* 2:4; cf. Jn 6:38). The fourth principle is that the mission of the agent is set within the context of a lawsuit. Thus, we find the statement, "Go forth and take legal action so that you may acquire title to it and secure the claim for yourself" (*B. Qam.* 70a), which sounds similar to the transfer-language of "Yours they were and you have given them to me" (Jn 17:6). Borgen (1986) 70 writes that "According to the *halakah* the sender transferred his own rights and the property concerned to his agent." In the words of FG, the Father has transferred his rights to Christ, who in turn functions as the Father's agent in the lawsuit with the world. The fifth principle concerns the agent's return and reporting to the sender (*y. Hag.* 76b; cf. Jn 13:3; 17:4). The sixth is that "an agent can appoint an agent" (*b. Qid.* 41a), which has striking resemblance to Jesus' statement that "As the Father

The most basic principle is that "an agent is like the one who sent him."[951] For example, the Talmud states that "the agent of the ruler is like the ruler himself" (*b. B. Qam.* 13b). This is similar to the description of the Son imitating the Father in Jn 5:17 and 5:19-30. *Sipre* on Num 12:9[952] states that to speak about the king's agent is to speak about the king himself, which is very similar to several sayings in FG:[953]

> *Sipre*: "you have not spoken concerning my servant but concerning me"
> Jn 12:44: "he who believes in me, believes not in me but in him who sent me"
> Jn 5:23: "whoever does not honor the Son does not honor the Father who sent him"
> Jn 13:20: "he who receives me receives him who sent me"
> Jn 14:9: "he who sees me sees him who sent me"

Borgen notes that the basic halakhic principle means that the agent was *like* the sender in legal matters but, in certain strands of mysticism, "the agent is a person identical with the sender."[954] Although the legal traditions that Borgen cites date to the third and fourth century C.E., they probably witness to earlier Jewish legal traditions.[955] Third, the idea that FG is presenting Jesus as God's agent is reinforced by the repeated use of father-son language. In the ancient world, the son was a father's agent *par excellence.* In Roman society, a father had legal authority over a son and could even treat him like a slave. The son could hold no property and was entirely subordinate to his father. As Epictetus wrote, a son's profession is "to treat everything that is his own as belonging to his father, to be obedient to him in all things."[956] In Jewish society, it was similar. Honoring father and mother was the highest duty next to honoring God.[957] Thus, in first-century societies, a son was dependent on his father for most things in life, from education to vocation. Often the son was the father's apprentice and, in time, inherited the father's business and possessions. This not only meant that a son knew his father well, but would act in the father's best interests, because a son would eventually inherit his father's estate.

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has sent me, even so I send you" (Jn 20:21), a Christian *halakah* authorizing the Johannine Jewish community to press the covenant law suit against their non-believing Jewish counterparts.

[951] Borgen (1986) 68 cites *Mek. Ex.* 12:3; 12:6; *b. Ber.* 5:5; *b. B. Meṣi'a* 96a; *b. Ḥag.* 10b; and other texts.

[952] *Sipre* on Num is a mid-third century text, according to Stemberger (1996) 267.

[953] The examples come from Borgen (1986) 68.

[954] Borgen (1986) 68 cites *b. Qod.* 43a.

[955] Since it is hardly likely that FG influenced the Rabbinic traditions (!), it is likely that the traditions cited by Borgen reflect earlier Jewish traditions of which FG may be one of the earliest witnesses.

[956] *Discourses* 2.7; see comments by Margaret Davies (1992) 130.

[957] Margaret Davies (1992) 130 cites Josephus's *Apion* 2.206 and Philo's *Dec.* 165-67.

Thus, in the father's absence, the son was the father's most useful and trusted agent in conducting business.[958] FG assumed social conventions of this nature when it used the father-son metaphor to depict Jesus' relationship with God. Jn 5:17 and 5:19-30 depicts Jesus as imitating the Father in every aspect of the Father's work; he is the Apprentice-Son and thus the Father's most trusted Agent.

(2) Jesus as God's Broker. Because FG was written in a *high context society* of the ancient Mediterranean world,[959] it is important to consider elements of that social system that would have been taken for granted by the original hearers or readers of FG. Each text would have evoked elements of the social system—such as honor and shame schemes; patron, broker, and clients models; male and female roles; and assumptions about purity and pollution—that first-century readers would have known and appropriated to *decode* the passage.[960] In the case of Jn 5:17-30, two different socio-cultural scenarios from the ancient Mediterranean world come to bear on its interpretation: patronage and kinship systems. First, from the perspective of a patronage system, Malina and Rohrbaugh argue that Jn 5:19-30 is "a classic statement of Jesus' brokerage."[961] In this scenario, a broker (Jesus) acts on behalf of the benefactor-patron (God) in offering the patron's resources to freeborn retainers or clients (Israel). The broker would *not* be viewed as the social equal of the patron, because the broker is only the patron's surrogate. As such, the honor claimed by the broker and acknowledged by the public is derived solely from the honor already accorded to the patron. From the perspective of patronage, Jesus was in no wise claiming to be God's equal, much less to be God Himself; rather, as God's surrogate, Jesus was claiming that people ought to give him the honor they would normally give the Great Benefactor (cf. Jn 5:23). Second, from the perspective of kinship relationships, which we have touched on in the previous paragraph dealing with

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[958] Margaret Davies (1992) 131.

[959] According to Malina and Rohrbaugh (1998) 16, a *high context society*, like the ancient Mediterranean world, "presumes a broadly shared, well-understood, or 'high,' knowledge of the context of anything referred to in conversation or in writing." Documents written in *high context* societies tend to be sketchy, because they assumed that readers and hearers were able to fill in the gaps with their knowledge of the prevalent customs, idioms, values, and symbols of the society. In contrast, *low context societies*, like the modern western world, assume a low knowledge of the social system, produce documents that are specific and detailed, and leave little room for readers to fill in the gaps (17).

[960] So Malina and Rohrbaugh (1998) 19-21.

agency, Jesus' use of the father-son metaphor would have evoked a whole host of socio-cultural associations and unstated assumptions. Take, for example, kinship relationships. "Kin group members are embedded in each other and share a common honor status. To refuse honor to one is to refuse honor to all."[962] Although a father would always have greater honor than a son, the kinship structure would ensure that the son had roughly the same honor as the father. So, between the father and son relationship, the son was subordinate, but from the perspective of people outside that kinship relationship, the son was accorded the same honor as the father.

(3) Summary. On the basis of Jewish principles of agency as well as models of patronage and kinship, it is probable that first-century readers or hearers of Jn 5:19-30 would have understood the Johannine Jesus to be announcing that he was *God's principal mediator who had an elite status and power second only to God Himself.*

13.5 How is Jesus' *equality with God* related to 'breaking' the Sabbath?

Here, we would like to consider Neyrey's contention that Jn 5:1-47 reflects two distinct redactions, each with a different charge, one in 5:16 and one in 5:18, and each with a different defense, one in 5:30-47 and one in 5:19-29.[963] Neyrey discerns an earlier redactive layer (reflecting a low christology and an earlier stage of FG development) and a later redactive layer superimposed over the first (reflecting a high christology and later Christian experience).[964]

	First Layer: 5:10-16, 30-47	Second Layer: 5:17-18, 19-29
Charge	Sabbath violation	Blasphemy
Defense	Witnesses testify about Jesus' sinlessness and his authority	Jesus explains that he is equal to God since he has God's powers
Judge	Jews judge Jesus	Jesus judges all people

[961] Malina and Rohrbaugh (1998) 116.
[962] Malina and Rohrbaugh (1998) 116.
[963] Neyrey (1988) 9-36, esp. 10-18. Similar redactional analysis can be found in Lindars (1972) 52, 216-18, who argues for a Galilean source and a later Jerusalemite source; see also Dodd (1953) 320 and Dodd (1963) 118.
[964] The chart is adapted from Neyrey (1988) 18.

Witnesses	John, Jesus' works, God, and Scripture	No witnesses
Judgment	Judges are judged for rejecting Jesus	Unbelievers are judged for not honoring Jesus

Neyrey's analysis suggests that the charge of violating the Sabbath is unrelated to the charge of Jesus claiming equality with God.[965] However, there are at least three reasons for seeing a close connection between the two charges.

First, as we have shown, the charge that Jesus *broke* or *released* (λυεῖν) the Sabbath (5:16, 18b) and the charge of *claiming equality with God* (5:18c-d) are held together in a tightly composed parallel pattern, consisting of two reaction-explanation-response units (cf. § 13.2 and § 13.4.1). The fabric of Jn 5:1-30 is woven together with common language and themes.[966] Verses 16-18 are also narratologically connected. They exhibit an escalation of conflict from prosecuting Jesus (ἐδίωκον ... τὸν Ἰησοῦν) in 5:16 to Jesus' defense regarding his imitation of the Father in 5:17 to the finally charge that Jesus is making himself equal to God in 5:18d.

Second, the connection between *working on the Sabbath* (5:16) and *equality with God* (5:18) is further strengthened by what appears to be the underlying assumption of 5:16-18. It presupposes early Jewish discussions reflected in the writings of Aristobulus,[967] Philo, and the Rabbis on whether God is active on the Sabbath.[968] Although there are several explanations, there was general agreement that God continued to exercise his providential activity on the Sabbath.[969] The fact that humans were born and died on the Sabbath was proof that "God was active on the Sabbath in these two ways: *in giving life* and *in judging* over life at death (cf. *b. Ta'an.* 2a)."[970]

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[965] Neyrey (1988) 16 states that "violating the Sabbath is *not* the same thing as claiming to be equal to God" (his italics).

[966] The verb, ποιεῖν (*to make* or *to do*) is used 12 times (Jn 5:11, 15, 16, 18, 19 [4xs], 20, 27, 29, 30), primarily in reference to healing or giving life. The verb, ἐγειρεῖν (*to raise [the dead]* or *to bring into being*), is used twice in crucial places (Jn 5:8, 21).

[967] Borgen (1996) 111 dates Aristobulus to the second century BCE.

[968] Borgen (1987) 89-92; Barrett (1978) 213; Brown (1966) 1.216; Bultmann (1971) 246; Yee (1989) 31-47.

[969] Yee (1989) 37-39 discusses three different Rabbinic explanations based on *b. Ta'anit* 2a; *Mek. Shabbata* 2.25; and *Gen. Rab.* 11.5, 10, 12.

[970] Yee (1989) 38; our emphasis.

Here, the Sabbath and the two great powers of God are linked, the same powers that Jesus claims to exercise in Jn 5:21-22, 27-28 (see § 13.4.2). In this way, Jesus claims that he, like God, continues to *work on the Sabbath* in matters of *giving life* and *judging* and it is in this way that he claims *equality with God.*

Third, as we have shown, leaders who attempted to suspend Sabbath customs were viewed as comparing themselves with God. Think of the nameless Egyptian ruler (Philo's *Somn.* 2.123-32; see § 11.4). Here was a powerful and presumptuous ruler who attempted to dissuade Jews from keeping the Sabbath and, through this, to undermine other Jewish customs. According to Philo, the Egyptian ruler tried to make the Sabbath a *workday* which, because it usurped divine prerogatives, was nothing short of making himself comparable to God—*he dared to liken himself to the All-blessed* (*Somn.* 2.130). Philo takes it for granted that *any attempt to change the customs of the Sabbath was to play God.*[971] Like the Egyptian ruler, Jesus' *practice of working on the Sabbath,*[972] which tacitly authorized the Johannine community to do the same, was tantamount to claiming *equality with God.* Thus Jn 5:16-30 not only affirms Jesus' divine status, it also marks the end of the Sabbath observance for Johannine Jewish believers.[973]

13.6 The Johannine blasphemy against God

Jn 5:16-30 does not mention blasphemy directly, but we are now in a position to identify how Jn 5:16-30 pertains to blasphemy and to articulate what theological and social implications the text had for the Johannine community—those who produced, preserved, and propagated FG during the late first-century.

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[971] In addition, Borgen (1987) 91, 97 argues that Philo was even critical of Jews who spiritualized the Sabbath and thought that they could acknowledge the universal pricinples and activity of the Creator without keeping particular laws and observances, such as the Sabbath (see. *Migr.* 89-93).

[972] The verb in the phrase, ταῦτα ἐποίει ἐν σαββάτῳ (Jn 5:16), can be translated as an iterative imperfect, *he used to do these things on the Sabbath,* suggesting repeated past action.

[973] Several scholars have noted this. Borgen (1996) 111-113 argues that Jn 5:1-18 leads to the conclusion that the Sabbath observance is to be abrogated based on his comparative analysis of Philo's *Leg.* 1:5-6, 18 and *Migr.* 89-93. Weiss (1991) 311-21 has come to a similar conclusion, arguing that the Johannine community "eschatologized the sabbath" and, as a result, "What the Johannine community explicitly came to say about the temple ('neither on this mountain nor in Jeruslaem will you worship the Father ... The true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth' [4:21, 23]), it could have said also about the sabbath ('neither on this day nor on the sabbath will you worship the Father; the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth" (320). Similarly, see Yee (1989) 39-42 and Borgen (1987) 88-97.

First, we argued that the affirmation that *Jesus is equal with God* was a claim propagated by the Johannine community. Because of the uniqueness of the claim, the vehemence of *the Jewish* reaction in 5:18, and the disproportionately large clarification that follows in Jn 5:19-30 (with the supporting witnesses in Jn 5:31-47) it is likely that the claim reflects a theological and social flashpoint for the Johannine community. Given the Jewish traditions that we surveyed, particularly Philo's perspective that giving earthly leaders honor equal to the gods (ἰσοθέων τιμῶν) paves the way to blaspheming Heaven itself,[974] it would not be surprising to find that *the Johannine confession that a man was equal with God would have brought the charge of blasphemy against the Johannine members themselves.*

Second, the Johannine affirmation that *Jesus is equal with God* would have recalled imagery of some of the most notorious blasphemers in Jewish history. Take Antiochus Epiphanes, who is characterized for Jewish posterity as a great blasphemer, who profaned the Temple of God (cf. § 9.3) and murdered Jews (cf. § 9.3). According to self-acclaim, Antiochus was "Epiphanes," *the manifest* [god] (cf. § 9.1). According to the Abridger of 2 Macc, Antiochus was a classic *theomachos,* one who contends with God, who *thought he was equal with the gods* (ὄντα ἰσόθεα φρονεῖν; 2 Macc 9:12), and yet died a deservedly shameful death after much humiliation and suffering (cf. § 9.5). In a number of other instances, we saw how blasphemy against God was invariably associated with arrogance or self-exaltation, the most odious form of which was direct comparison with God or self-exaltation above God. Such exaltation or comparison either denies God's uniqueness or diminishes His honor. The Johannine community could have been perceived as exalting Jesus in the same way, thereby blaspheming God. From the perspective of the Johannine community, what differentiated Jesus from Antiochus and other infamous blasphemers, was that Jesus did not exalt himself—he *made nothing of himself* (Jn 5:19, 30)—but was *lifted up* or *exalted* by divine initiative (Jn 3:13-14). Within early Judaism, there was an assumption that God could exalt a man or an

[974] Cf. *Mos.* 2.203-208 and *Decal.* 61-65 and our comments in § 11.2 and § 11.3.

angel to be as God, but if one *made himself* God, then divine punishment followed.[975] Jewish tradition accepts that certain men, like Moses (Exod 7:1; *Mos.* 1.155-159; Heb. Sir 45:2),[976] and certain heavenly figures, like Melchizedek (11QMelch 2.10, 24-25) and Yahoel (*Apoc. Ab.* 10:3-4), can be spoken of as *God* without misgiving, but only because God exalted them. And that was the Johannine claim regarding Jesus—God exalted him—a repudiation to the charge that they share in the self-exaltative blasphemy of their master.

Third, if asserting that *Jesus was equal with God* did not provoke stone-throwing at Johannine members, then *the Johannine clarification* in Jn 5:19-30, or a similar explanation, certainly would have. Based on our analysis of the *intratextual* context, we concluded that Jesus was characterized as having *endowed equality with God.* By that we meant the Son was portrayed as exercising identical authority and power with the Father, but such authority and power was entirely granted or endowed to the Son by the Father. It dispels any notion that Jesus was a rival god. Still, the *Johannine clarification*—Jesus had *endowed equality with God*—would have been construed as blasphemous by non-believing Jews in that the Johannine Jews claimed *for Jesus* what belonged to God alone, His honor and His authority. It was tantamount to stealing from God, the metaphysical parallel to Antiochus plundering the Temple. In this way, non-believing Jews could easily have accused the Johannine group of gravely dishonoring God or blasphemy. Indeed, the *Johannine clarification* could be viewed as diminishing God's uniqueness—as if the Johannine group were saying "Jesus deserves divine honor and glory, not just God"—thus violating Jewish monotheistic sensitivities.

Fourth, if the Johannine group had encountered non-believing Jews who had been influenced by apocalyptic Son of Man traditions, then another set of assumptions regarding blasphemy come into play. The *Johannine clarification* in Jn 5:19-30 qualifies the phrase, *equal with God*, with the statement that Jesus is *(the) Son of Man* (5:27). FG presents Jesus as the glorified *Son of Man* and the only manifestation of

[975] Paraphrasing Beasley-Murray (1987) 75, who refers to God making Moses as God (Exod 7:1), but making Pharaoh nothing because he presumed to be God (cf. *Tanḥ. B* 12).

[976] Hurtado (1988) 56-63.

YHWH's glory for human experience. For non-believing Jews, the blasphemy is two-pronged. On the one hand, it would have been perceived as an affront to God. As such, it was theological theft, robbing God of His glory and giving it to a man but, even more, because it was giving God's honor to someone who had died as a criminal under humiliating circumstances, it shows additional contempt for God. On the other hand, it is possible that it would have been perceived as an affront to God's chosen leaders. It denied that any leader of Israel, such as Yoḥanan ben Zakkai, had ever had mystical revelations of divine glory.[977] And it denied that Moses had ever ascended Mount Sinai and basked in YHWH's glory (cf. *Mos.* 1.157-58; *Ezek. Trag.* 68-89). Such polemic points to two rival groups within the synagogue, disciples of Moses (or Yoḥanan) and disciples of Jesus (cf. Jn 9:28-29, 35-37).

Fifth, given the common assumptions regarding the Son of Man that circulated during the first century, it is conceivable that when the Johannine community spoke of Jesus as *(the) Son of Man* it would have been understood that they were saying Jesus was a pre-existent glorious being, who was both God's second in heaven and the leader (messiah) of God's people on earth. If the Johannine claim was so interpreted, it is possible that it would have been an affront to the non-believing Jewish leadership and therefore perceived as blasphemous. Furthermore, the Johannine rendition of *(the) Son of Man* tradition has the Son exercising the two great powers of God, mercy and justice. By linking the Son of Man with the two great powers, the *Johannine clarification* in Jn 5:19-30 forms a bridge between the Danielic Son of Man tradition (Dan 7), which expresses divine sovereignty in anthropomorphic language, and later Rabbinic tradition (*b. Ḥag.* 14a), which resists compromising God's transcendence by expressing divine sovereignty in the language of abstract powers, justice and mercy.[978] The *Johannine clarification* that Jesus functioned as God's Viceroy, second in rank to God, would have met with mixed reaction. For some Jews, belief that God had a Viceroy and that heaven was

[977] Later Jewish tradition asserts that Yoḥanan, who was the founder of the Rabbinic movement in Yavneh, was a master of Mishnah, Talmud, and mysticism (*'Abot R. Nat.* A 14, B 28; *b. Sukkah* 28a; *y. Ned.* 5, 39b).

[978] My appreciation to Loren Stuckenbruck for pointing out how Jn 5:19-30 appears to bridge earlier Danielic and later Rabbinic traditions.

populated with a hierarchy of divine beings would not have been disturbing,[979] though identifying Jesus as that Viceroy might not have been acceptable. For other Jews, belief that God had a Viceroy, that Jesus functioned as a second power in heaven, might have been viewed as blasphemy on the grounds that it dishonored God. However, the concept of *two* powers[980] in heaven was itself not blasphemous; it only becomes blasphemous when it is perceived to discredit, disparage, or dishonor God. As we have seen, there is evidence of Rabbinic opposition to two-powers beliefs in the early second century,[981] and it is not unthinkable that some non-believing Jews, even in the first-century, would have found the Johannine claim—"Jesus is God's Viceroy"—to be offensive and would have picked up stones to throw or, perhaps, like R. Jose, cried out, "You profane the *Shekhina*!" (*b. Ḥag.* 17). The blasphemy, however, would have pertained to dishonoring or disparaging God, not to how many powers populated heaven.

Sixth, even if the Johannine community encountered non-believing Jews who were *not* aware of apocalyptic Son of Man traditions, it is likely that the *Johannine clarification* in Jn 5:19-30 still would have provoked the charge of blasphemy against the Johannine group. From what can be assumed about patronage systems of the ancient world, the *Johannine clarification* in 5:19-30 presents Jesus as the power broker for God. As such, Jesus (the broker) was not the social equal of God (the patron) but, nevertheless, for the patronage system to work, clients must *treat* the broker like the patron. As Borgen noted in regard to Jewish *halakah*, the agent (broker) is *like* the Sender (patron). From this perspective, the *Johannine clarification* would be asserting that *Jesus must be treated like God* because he is God's honored broker—"Anyone who does not honor the Son does not honor the Father who sent him" (Jn 5:23b; NRSV). Furthermore, from the perspective of kinship relationships,

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[979] There is plenty of evidence that Jews believed in divine beings; see § 13.4.2 (no. 4), footnotes 536-538, and Hurtado (1988) 71-92 for his treatement of *principal angels* in early Judaism.

[980] Philo speaks of "the two ... powers, the creative and the kingly" (δύο ... δυνάμεις, τήν τε ποιητικὴν καὶ βασιλικήν) (*Mos.* 2.99).

[981] Segal (1979) 159-219 provides good evidence that Philo, certain NT writings, and apocalyptic and mystical traditions exhibited two-power beliefs. However, Segal (wrongly) categorizes such beliefs from the first-century as *heresey* (118). It is *heresy* only from the retrojected perspective of Rabbinic Judaism. Segal is unable to cite evidence that *opposition* to two-powers beliefs emerged during the first-century and at one point states, "the rabbinic polemic against 'two powers' ... can not be dated earlier than the time of Ishmael and Akiba" (260), which is ca. 130-140 C.E.

which assumes that family members share a common status, the Johannine use of the father-son metaphor tacitly demands that people give the same honor to Jesus as they give to God. So, from the perspective of patronage and kinship systems of the ancient world, it is likely that the *Johannine clarification*—Jesus is both the Son and broker for the Father—would have been heard as audacious blasphemy by non-believing Jews.[982] As Philo essentially argues in *Decal.* 61-65, to give earthly leaders *equal honor to God* (ἰσοθέων τιμῶν) is to blaspheme (see § 11.3).

Seventh, and last, we argued that the issue of *breaking* or *releasing* (λυεῖν; 5:18b) the Sabbath was intimately connected to the Johannine claim that *Jesus was equal with God*, that he exercised the two great powers of God. Keeping the Sabbath[983] was a visible reminder of God's *creative power* and an enduring symbol of His covenant relationship with Israel.[984] Releasing (or breaking) the Sabbath would have invited harsh criticism from fellow Jews (cf. *Migr.* 89-93) and attempts to establish a practice of working on the Sabbath was tantamount to playing God (*Somn.* 2.123-32). The Johannine claim that Jesus was equal with God, that he *played God* by exercising the great powers of creating and judging, even on the Sabbath, may have functioned as authorization for the Johannine members to *release* the Sabbath themselves and establish new Sabbath customs. If so, then they could have been viewed *sinning with a high-hand*, like the Sabbath breaker who flouted God (Num 15:30-36),[985] and blaspheming God by their overt public contempt for the Sabbath.

The apparent "treachery" that the Johannine Jews may have embarked on is reinforced by the story of Nicanor forcing Jews to work on the Sabbath (cf. § 10.3; 2 Macc 15:4-5). When he was told not to disrespect of the Sovereign in Heaven who ordained the Sabbath, Nicanor claimed that he was a *Sovereign on earth!* and could do as he pleased. Like Nicanor, Jesus (and the Johannine Jews) is warned not to

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[982] Jn 5:17-18 in light of 19:7 reinforces this conclusion.

[983] Keeping the Sabbath is largely understood in terms of prohibitions. The Hebrew Bible prohibits working (Exod 31:15), cooking (Exod 16:23), farming (Exod 34:21), lighting fires (Exod 35:3), gathering sticks (Num 15:32), conducting business (Amos 8:5: Neh 10:31; 13:15-18), and carrying burdens (Jer 17:21-22). Later, the Rabbis deduced thirty-nine classes of work that were prohibited on the Sabbath (*m. Sabb.* 7:2).

[984] Exod 31:15-17; Yee (1989) 34.

[985] See § 7.1 and § 7.3.

disrespect the Sabbath, but in response Jesus (and the Johannine Jews) claim that he as *equal authority as the Father!* and could work on the Sabbath as he/they pleased.

13.7 Conclusions

We have argued that there are good reasons for supposing that the Johannine Jewish Christians were perceived as blasphemers. We argued that the author of FG wanted readers to understand that the claim made in Jn 5:18—that *Jesus was equal with God*—was a Johannine claim. The claim was affirmed and qualified in Jn 5:19-30. As FG affirms, Jesus was equal to God because God endowed him, *(the) Son of Man*, with the power to give life and to judge. For a Jewish audience in the late first-century, such a description could have brought to mind a number of traditions or assumptions regarding an apocalyptic Son of Man, visions of YHWH's glory, God's two great powers, as well as patronage and kinship relationships in the ancient world.

For each of these traditions or assumptions that might have influenced a first-century interpretation of Jn 5:18-30, we have concluded that it was reasonable to assume that the *Johannine claim* and the *Johannine clarification* regarding Jesus' equality with God would have been regarded as blasphemous by non-believing Jews. We have argued that non-believing Jews would have been repulsed by the Johannine exaltation of Jesus, not only because it appeared to disparage and dishonor God, but also because it seemed to violate the unique status of the God of Israel.

To the extent to which the Johannine community declared that Jesus was equal with God, whatever precise language they may have used, they committed blasphemy in the perception of non-believing Jews. At one time, non-believing zealous Jews felt it their duty to force Christians to blaspheme (Acts 26:11), but with the publication of FG, Jewish Christians had become openly "blasphemous" in their exaltation of their master, who had been accused of the same crime years before.

Chapter 14
"Jesus Is The New Temple"

We have argued that blasphemy in early Judaism may be characterized as an attack against God, God's Temple, or God's chosen leaders. In the previous chapter, we focused primarily on whether FG and the Johannine community would have been perceived as attacking God by their exaltation of Jesus. In this chapter, we ask whether FG and the Johannine group would have been perceived as attacking the Temple in some way. We focus on how FG treats the Jerusalem Temple that was *razed* in 70 CE and the Temple of Jesus' body that was *raised* from the dead.

First, we review how, in the aftermath of the catastrophe in 70 CE, the memory of the Temple continued to provide a basis of self-identity, authority, and hope for many Jews during the late first-century. Second, we show that FG places an extraordinary emphasis on the Temple and its symbolism and applies them to Jesus. Lastly, we argue that the Johannine community, because of their claim that *Jesus was the New Temple*, ran the risk of being charged with blasphemy by non-believing Jews.

14.1 The Jerusalem Temple *in Memoriam*

The destruction of the Temple by Titus in 70 CE was the last in a series of major threats, desecrations, and destructions by Sennacherib in 701 BCE, Nebuchadnezzar in 586/7 BCE, Antiochus Epiphanes in 167 BCE, Nicanor in 162 BCE, and Pompey in 63 BCE. The fall of the Jerusalem Temple in 70 CE had important repercussions for various Jews groups, each of which responded with different ideas about the Temple's significance and future.[986]

One repercussion, according to Cohen, was that the destruction of the Temple in 70 CE marked the end of sectarianism. Jewish *sects*[987] in the first century "advanced

[986] On the importance of the Temple as the center of Jewish national life and how it symbolized the dwelling-place of God, the cosmic center of the universe, and Israel's election, see § 9.4.

[987] Cohen (1984) 29-30 includes the Essences, Christians, Sadducees, and the Pharisees as sectarian and, following the works of Brian Wilson, defines a *sect*, among other things, "as an

different theories of self-legitimation, but the authority figures against whom they always defined themselves were the priests of the temple."[988] They polemicized against the temple of Jerusalem, saying that either its cult was profane or its priests were illegitimate and, just as it was claimed that the Jerusalem Temple was the only house of God,[989] so different groups claimed that they were the (temporary) replacements or equivalents of the one Temple.[990] In this way, each group, including Christians, defined themselves vis-à-vis the Temple and appropriated the Temple's exclusive claims for themselves.[991] With the destruction of the Temple, the institutional basis for such claims was removed and certain *sects* virtually disappeared. However, for certain Jews (as we shall argue), the significance and symbolism of the Temple, even after its fall, continued to be used to legitimate authority, provide hope, and consolidate their identity. In essence, the Temple lived on *in memoriam*.

First, Rabbinic literature and the Bar-Kokhba Revolt (132-35 CE) attest to the enduring significance and role that memories of the Temple played for early Judaism. Rabbinic literature preserves some of the most important memories of the Temple, because the Rabbis believed that the Temple continued to define Jewish life and thought. As Neusner observes, the Mishnah stresses "the priestly caste and the Temple cult," since it focuses on the Mishnah's principle concern, which is sanctification.[992] Just glancing at a few of the 63 tractates (*massekhet*) of the Mishnah confirms Neusner's observation: *Sheqalim* deals with Temple tax, *Yoma* with regulations regarding the Day of Atonement and the preparation by the high priest, *Ḥagigah* with the three festivals of pilgrimage to the Temple, *Zebaḥim* with the preparation of sacrifices, *Tamid* with laws concerning the daily prayers and burnt offering in the Temple, and *Middot* with the measurement of the Temple and its

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organized group which separates itself from the community and asserts that it alone has religious truth" (29).

[988] Cohen (1984) 43.

[989] E.g., Josephus *Ag.Ap.* 2.193 states that there is only "one temple for one God."

[990] For example, the Qumran community rejected the Jerusalem Temple and priesthood; they saw themselves as a faithful remnant of Israel and, to some extent, as the Temple. The Samaritans also rejected the Jerusalem Temple and priesthood and advocated their own cultic worship on Mount Gerizim. The Zealots probably defined themselves in relation to the earthly Temple in Jerusalem, not the heavenly temple.

[991] Cohen (1984) 43.

furnishings. It is as if the Temple continued to exist in the Rabbinic literature itself, preserving a wealth of information that would be necessary to rebuild the Temple when the time came.[993]

Second, the enduring significance of the Temple, and the religious cult which it symbolized, is also evident in the minting of the silver tetradrachma coins by Bar-Kokhba dated as year 1 (132/133 CE), depicting the façade of the Temple with the ark of the covenant in the center and the inscription, *Jerusalem*, on the side (see photo).[994] "The coins of the Second Jewish Revolt were struck under the aegis of Bar Kokhba in an effort to restore the Temple and reinstitute services."[995] Thus, more than 60 years after the destruction of the Temple, the Temple not only loomed large in Jewish memory, but also became a rallying point for Jewish nationalism. The hope for another *earthly* Jerusalem Temple persisted beyond the Bar-Kokhba revolt (132-35 CE), including an attempt to rebuild it during the reign of Emperor Julian (362-63 CE) and another effort during the Persians' control of Jerusalem (614 CE).[996]

Third, certain Jewish apocalypticists also attest to the enduring significance and memory of the Temple after 70 CE but, in comparison with Bar-Kokhba and the Rabbis, a *heavenly* Temple comes more to the fore. Written in response to the catastrophe in 70 CE, 2 Baruch presents the idea that the earthly Temple has a heavenly counterpart that cannot be harmed by earthly destructions and profanations (2 Bar 4:2-6).[997] It is uncertain whether the author of 2 Baruch was concerned with building a new earthly Temple, but certainly he affirms an eschatological restoration of some type.[998] Again, written about the same time, 4 Ezra presents a series of visions, one of which includes a heavenly revelation of the glory of the future

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[992] Neusner (1994) 99.
[993] So Meyers (1992) 6.368.
[994] See Betlyon (1992) 1.1088 for a description. The photo is from Edersheim (1997) 111.
[995] Betlyon (1992) 1.1088.
[996] See Meyers (1992) 367 for more details of these three endeavors.
[997] Regarding the heavenly Temple, 2 Baruch makes explicit what was already implicit in Exod 25:9, Ezek 40-48, and Isa 6:1-5.
[998] See comments by Collins (1998) 215.

restored Jerusalem (4 Ezra 7:26; 10:25-27, 50-54).[999] The *Apocalypse of Abraham*, also written during this period, presents a heavenly vision of the ideal Temple as a foil against which God criticizes his people (*Apoc. Ab.* 25:4). In fact, for the *Apocalypse of Abraham*, "the focal point of history is the destruction of the temple," a calamity which is attributed "to the sins of the Jews" where the problem appears to be cultic defilement and idolatry.[1000] Although all three apocalypses focus on a *heavenly* Temple, unassailable from the evil vicissitudes of earthly life, they also implicitly affirm the restoration of a new earthly Temple,[1001] probably reflecting the hope that the Temple would be rebuilt just as it had been after the Babylonian destruction.[1002]

Fourth, we can add some Christian perspectives. It is clear that early Christians adopted Jewish traditions that referred to a heavenly or eschatological Temple, spoke of the community as the Temple, and criticized the Temple and its cult.[1003] What is remarkable is that *early Christian writings never mention that the Temple might be rebuilt.* Jesus' own attitudes toward the Temple stood within the traditions of Second Temple Judaism.[1004] Nevertheless, beginning with the Stephen affair (Acts 6:8—7:60) there was "a growing breach with Temple-centred Judaism."[1005] As Acts describes it, *Stephen was stoned for blasphemy, not because of what he said about Jesus the Messiah, but for what he said about the Temple.*[1006] Even before the destruction, Paul transformed the symbolism of the Jerusalem Temple so that the Temple was valuable for its imagery, but not for its actuality.[1007] With the Epistle to

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[999] See comments by Collins (1998) 205-6.

[1000] Collins (1998) 231.

[1001] On 2 Baruch, see 2 Bar 32:3-4 and the comments by Collins (1998) 215. 4 Ezra 10:50-54 seems to depict a future (earthly) Zion; so Nickelsburg (1981) 291 and Collins (1998) 205. The *Apoc. Ab.* 29:18 implies a future earthly Temple by the affirmation of sacrifices in the age of justice; see the comments by Collins (1998) 230.

[1002] So Dunn (1991) 87.

[1003] Nickelsburg (1991) 77-84.

[1004] So Dunn (1991) 37-56.

[1005] So Dunn (1991) 74.

[1006] So Dunn (1991) 64. The offense is particularly evident in Acts 7:48: "The Most High does not dwell in houses *made of human hands*," where the term, χειροποίητος (*made with hands*) is used to describe the Temple, a term often used to describe idols, thus insinuating that "*the Temple itself [was] an idol*!" (67).

[1007] So Dunn (1991) 75-86 who argues that the imagery was useful, for example, in describing the community of Christians as the Temple (e.g., 1 Cor 3:16), Christ's death as sacrifice (e.g., Rom 3:25), purity issues (Rom 14:14), and the new ideal, heavenly Jerusalem (Gal 4:21-31).

the Hebrews, probably written to Jewish Christians during or shortly after the Jewish revolt (66-70 CE), the Temple and its cult were not only criticized,[1008] but the future heavenly Jerusalem was described as already present for the followers of Jesus,[1009] making the rebuilding of the Jerusalem Temple superfluous. This trend is developed further by 1 Pet 2:5-9 and Rev 1:5-6 (cf. 5:10). In fact, in his vision of the New Heavenly Jerusalem, the author of Revelation has no place for a Temple:

I saw no temple in the city, for its temple is the Lord God the Almighty and the Lamb (Rev 21:22; NRSV)	Καὶ ναὸν οὐκ εἶδον ἐν αὐτῇ, ὁ γὰρ κύριος ὁ θεὸς ὁ παντοκράτωρ ναὸς αὐτῆς ἐστιν καὶ τὸ ἀρνίον. (UBS^4)

Regarding Rev 21:22, Sanders writes, "This is clearly a polemic against the normal expectation of Judaism," which he argues involved the restoration of Jerusalem and its Temple.[1010]

The point we are making is that *debate over the significance and the future of the Temple* was alive and well during the late first-century. In the aftermath of the Temple's destruction, when Judaism was struggling to survive without a central place of worship, it is not surprising that FG also refers to the loss of the Temple[1011] and, as we argue in the following, has much to say about its significance and future.

14.2 The Johannine Temple *in the making*

At this point, we move on to indicate how FG appropriates the significance and symbolism of the Temple and, simultaneously, show that FG makes repeated references to the Temple and its traditions, which, in the least, signals that the Temple was a central concern for the Johannine community. What is more, the *tone* with which statements are made about the Temple, the *frequency* with which they are made, the *uniqueness* of some of the expressions, and *historical factors* of the late-first century suggest that the Temple was a point of sensitivity or flashpoint between

[1008] See Dunn (1991) 86-90.
[1009] Heb 11:10, 15; 12:22-23; 13:10-14.
[1010] E.P. Sanders (1985) 86; cf. 88.
[1011] This is suggested by three statements: "destroy this Temple" (Jn 2:19), "the hour is coming when you worship the Father neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem" (Jn 4:21), and "the Romans will come and destroy both our holy place and our nation" (Jn 11:28).

the Johannine community and other Jews.[1012] In our survey of the Johannine material, we divide it into Johannine *statements* and Johannine *themes* about the Temple.

14.2.1 Statements about the Temple

(1) "The word dwelled among us" (Jn 1:14). At the beginning of the Gospel, John strikes out with a bold pronouncement:

> The Word became flesh and dwelled (ἐσκήνωσεν) among us, full of grace and truth; we have beheld his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father. (Jn 1:14; RSV).

The verb in this phrase comes from σκηνόω and can be translated *dwelled*, *set up his tent*, or even *tabernacled*.[1013] The verb recalls, in both sound and meaning, the Hebrew שכן and the Greek κατασκηνόω, both of which were used to describe God dwelling with Israel in the Tabernacle and later in the Temple.[1014] Prophets like Joel, Ezekiel and Zechariah also use the words שכן and κατασκηνόω to speak of God dwelling or coming to dwell with his people in Zion.[1015] A striking parallel to Jn 1:14 can be found in 2 Macc 14:35, which states that the *temple* (ναόν) is the Lord's *dwelling among us* (σκηνώσεως ἐν ἡμῖν γενέσθαι).[1016]

In later rabbinic literature, שכינה became a technical term for *God's presence*, particularly among those who meet for the study of the Torah[1017] and, in the Targums, שכינה was used as a way of speaking about the divine presence and as a substitute for the divine name.[1018] It is also important to note that the dwelling of God among his people was linked to his *glory* (כבוד; δόξα), which appeared in the cloud that led Israel (Ex 16:10) and came to reside in both the Tabernacle (Ex 40:34-38) and the Temple (1 Kgs 8:10-11). After the destruction of Solomon's Temple, Ezekiel

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[1012] Here we follow the criteria for *mirror-reading* a polemical text; see Barclay (1987) 73-93, esp. 84-5.

[1013] The Hebrew noun for 'tabernacle' is משכן and the LXX is σκηνή.

[1014] Ex 25:8-9; cf Ex 40:43-38; 1 Kgs 8:10-11; Ezek 43:7; Joel 3:17; Zech 2:14[10]; Barrett (1979) 165-6; Brown (1966) 32-4; Schnackenburg (1968) 1.269.

[1015] Joel 3:17; Ezek 43:7; Zech 2:10.

[1016] Σὺ κύριε ... ηὐδόκησας ναόν τῆς σῆς σκηνώσεως ἐν ἡμῖν γενέσθαι (2 Macc 4:35), which we translate, "You, Lord ... were pleased there should be a temple for your dwelling among us."

[1017] *m. Aboth* 3.2b: "But if two sit together and words of the Law [are spoken] between them, the Divine Presence {שכינה} rests between them"; see Danby (1933) 450.

said that God's glory left the city but, in a subsequent vision of the restored Temple, he saw the glory of God once again filling the building (Ezek 11:23; 44:4). The connection between God's glory and his presence in the Tabernacle and Temple may also account for the mention of δόξα in Jn 1:14. Although much more could be said,[1019] it is sufficient to say that FG describes Jesus in language that is appropriate to the Tabernacle and Temple traditions of Israel.

(2) "You will see heaven opened" (Jn 1:51). In an opening scene of FG, Jesus demonstrates foreknowledge of Nathanael who, in amazement, names Jesus the Messiah. But the author of FG is not satisfied with purely messianic titles, which do not penetrate the mystery of Jesus' identity,[1020] and so Jesus promises that Nathanael will see *greater things* (μείζω τούτων), namely, heaven itself being opened:

> Truly, truly, I say to you, you will see heaven *already opened* (ἀνεῳγότα), and the angels of God ascending and descending upon the Son of Man (1:51; our translation).

The verse has its difficulties,[1021] but there is some agreement about its meaning and function within FG. First, there is general agreement that the perfect passive participle, ἀνεῳγότα (*having been opened*), refers to the heavens as *already having been torn open* and *continuing to be open*,[1022] not a future event as in the Synoptics.[1023] Second, it is widely agreed that Jn 1:51 alludes to Jacob's dream in Gen 28:10-22:[1024]

[1018] Brown (1966) 34.

[1019] About Jewish wisdom literature; cf. 1 Enoch 42:1, Bar 3:38; Sirach 24:8, 11-12; Wis of Sol 9:8,10. More could also be said about God dwelling with his people; cf. 2 Macc 13:11 (para Jn 1:14), Rev. 21:3.

[1020] So Ashton (1991) 346.

[1021] Brown (1966) 88 observes that "this verse has caused as much trouble for commentators as any other single verse in the Fourth Gospel." First, there are questions about variant readings. Barrett (1979) 186 notes that ἀπ' ἄρτι (*from now*) prefixes the phrase ὄψεσθε τὸν οὐρανὸν ἀνεῳγότα (*you will see heaven having been opened*) in Θ Ω λ ϕ e pesh Chrysostom Augustine, but should be rejected. Second, there are questions about Johannine redaction; Brown (1966) 88-9 cites five redactional problems. Third, there are great complexities associated with the use of *(the) Son of Man*; see § 13.4.2 and Hare (1990) 80-81 who lists six different interpretations. Fourth, there are questions about the literary environment in which *ascent and descent* language can be properly understood; see § 13.4.2.

[1022] E.g., Moloney (1998) 57; Ridderbos (1997) 94.

[1023] Mk 14:62; Mt 26:64; cf. Isa 64:1.

[1024] So Moloney (1998) 57; Ridderbos (1997) 93-5; Ashton (1991) 342; Beasley-Murray (1987) 28; Barrett (1978) 186-7; Bultmann (1971) 105-6; Schnackenburg (1968) 320-2; Brown (1966) 90-1; Dodd (1953) 245-6.

> And he dreamed that there was a ladder set up on the earth, the top of it reaching to heaven; and the angels of God were ascending and descending on it... Then Jacob woke from his sleep and said, "Surely the LORD is in this place—and I did not know it!" And he was afraid, and said, "How awesome is this place! This is none other than the house of God, and this is the gate of heaven" (Gen 28:12, 15-16; NRSV; our underlining).

Precisely how Jn 1:51 alludes to Gen 28 is debated. Suffice to say, according to Brown, there are at least five basic interpretations,[1025] each based on various Jewish interpretations of Gen 28.[1026] Brown sums up the five approaches by saying, "in the theme that they have in common they are probably correct ... the vision means that Jesus as Son of Man has become the locus of divine glory, the point of contact between heaven and earth."[1027] As Brown's survey brings out, there is broad agreement that Jn 1:51, in light of Jewish interpretations of Gen 28, alludes to the Temple or to themes associated with it. His summary, which is very similar to those of other commentators,[1028] could have been applied to the Temple—"the locus of divine glory, the point of contact between heaven and earth." As we argued in § 9.4, the Temple was perceived as the place where heaven and earth converged and the center from which God dealt with humanity. Thus, what Jacob concludes about *the place*—it was the house of Divine Glory, the gate of heaven—can be said of *the person, (the) Son of Man*, who is the locus of Divine Glory.[1029]

(3) **"Zeal for your house will consume me" (Jn 2:17).** Another indication of the importance of the Temple for FG is the placement of the so-called Temple cleansing incident at the beginning of the Gospel (2:13-22), rather than at the end as in the Synoptics. In this way, the Temple cleansing incident is programmatic for FG.[1030] It not only sets in motion a conflict between Jesus and the Temple

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[1025] Brown (1966) 90-91.

[1026] See *Midr. Rab.* 69.3 on Gen 28:13; *Midr. Rab.* 68.12 on Gen 28:12; see *Tgs. Onq., Neof., Ps.-J., and Frag. Tg.* pertaining to Gen 28; Brown (1966) 90-91 also cites other non-specified Jewish tradition.

[1027] Brown (1966) 91.

[1028] E.g., Schnackenburg (1968) 320 states that John alludes to Jacob's vision to show "that the Son of Man is the 'place' of the full revelation of God ('Bethel'), where God manifests his glory to the vision of faith (cf. 2:11; 11:40; 14:8ff.)." Further on, he writes, "Thus the Son of Man on earth is the 'gate of heaven' (cf. Gen 28:17), the place of the presence of God's grace on earth, the tent of God among men (cf. 1:14)" (321).

[1029] Ashton (1991) 348 who argues similarly.

[1030] Ashton (1991) 414-8 talks about the 'Temple cleansing' narrative as programmatic, but in a different sense than I will explore here. Ashton argues that Jesus' riddle—"Destroy this temple and in three days I will raise it" (2:19)—provides the key for reading the Gospel. Only from a post-

authorities, it sets Jesus in tension with the Temple itself. On the first Passover mentioned in FG, Jesus goes into the Temple, drives out some animals, overturns the tables of the money changers, and declares that no one should make his father's house a market place. It seems as if the violence displayed by Jesus demanded an explanation and so the author of FG supplies one:

> His disciples remembered that it was written, "Zeal for thy house will consume (καταφάγεται)] me." (Jn 2:17)

The disciples are interpreting Jesus' cleansing of the Temple in light of scripture, which says, "Zeal for your house will consume [καταφάγεταί] me" (2:17).[1031] The quotation is from the LXX Psa 69:9, except that the tense of the verb has been changed from the past (*has consumed*) to the future (*will consume*). It is undoubtedly an allusion to Jesus' death, since the next three verses explicitly refer to his death (2:18-21). In this way, Jesus' death is linked to his confrontation with the Temple establishment. No other NT document is as clear as FG in this: Jesus died because of his conflict with the Temple.

(4) "I will raise up a new Temple" (Jn 2:19). After Jesus cleanses the Temple and declares that no one should make his father's house a market place, *the Jews* challenge his authority and ask him for a sign (2:18). Jesus replies with a riddle,

> Destroy this Temple and in three days I will raise it up (Jn 2:19; RSV).

The verb, *destroy* (λύσατε) is an aorist imperative, a command to demolish the Temple.[1032] Because this riddle follows right after the cleansing, it is natural to assume that it refers to Herod's Temple. Making this assumption, *the Jews* respond to Jesus with ridicule: "This temple has been under construction for forty-six years, and will you raise it up in three days?"(2:20). But *the Jews* have misunderstood Jesus, as we will see. What is noteworthy is what *the Jews* are focusing on. Are *the Jews* concerned with the *destruction* of the Temple? Or are they concerned with the

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resurrection perspective did the disciples understand that Jesus was talking about his body. Thus the Temple riddle informs the readers from the beginning that what *Jesus' hearers* could not understand, *John's readers* could. Hence, FG witnesses to two stages of revelation (two levels of understanding); at one level, to the events of Jesus' lifetime and, at another, to the events experienced by the Johannine community (so Martyn [1979] 30).

[1031] Barrett (1979) 198-9. Jn 11:48-51 links Jesus supposed threat to the Temple with his death.

rebuilding of the Temple? Clearly, they focus on the rebuilding of the Temple—they ask, "will you raise it in three days?" This suggests that the Johannine account was addressing a post-70 CE situation in which Jews were concerned about if and when God would rebuild the Temple. It is in this context that the narrator intrudes into the account and says that, of course, Jesus was not talking about the rebuilding of Herod's Temple, but *the temple of his body* (τοῦ ναοῦ τοῦ σώματος) (2:21). For the Johannine community, the claim that the Temple of Jesus was already risen, when the ruins of the old Jerusalem Temple were plainly visible to all, undoubtedly meant that somehow, the person of Jesus was the New (and only) Temple, replacing the old.[1033]

(5) "Neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem" (Jn 4:21). If John and the Johannine community were presenting Jesus as the New Temple, whatever precisely that meant, it would have made any hopes or desires for rebuilding the Jerusalem Temple superfluous.[1034] The redundancy of the Jerusalem Temple seems to be the conclusion reached by Jesus in his discussion with the Samaritan woman. When she asks him to resolve the dispute between the Samaritans and the Judeans regarding where the Temple should stand—whether on Mount Gerizim or Mount Zion—he tells her,

> Jesus said to her, "Woman, believe me, the hour is coming when neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem will you worship the Father... the hour is coming, and is now here" (Jn 4:21-22; RSV).

Given that the Samaritan Temple at Gerizim had been destroyed in 128 B.C.E.,[1035] Jesus' prediction that the Jerusalem Temple would meet the same fate can hardly be missed. That the predicted destruction had happened is suggested by the phrase, "the time is coming and now is."[1036] The point seems to be that another Temple, whether

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[1032] The imperative is conditional; Schnackenburg (1968) 1.350, n. 27; Barrett (1979) 199.

[1033] The novelty of speaking about a specific person as the Temple is not without comparison. The Qumran council of the community thought of themselves as a Temple of God (1QS 8.5-14). Paul spoke of the church as a Temple of God (1 Cor 3:16). Isaiah even declared that YHWH "will become a sanctuary" (Isa 8:14a).

[1034] Since there is only one God and one Temple; so Josephus *Ag.Ap.* 2.193.

[1035] Josephus *Ant.* 13:9.1; *War* 1.2.6; cf. Lott (1992) 2.993.

[1036] Barrett (1979) 237 notes that this phrase "refers to events which seem on the surface to belong to a later time," but contends that it refers to "a pure and spiritual worship" proleptically present.

on this mountain or that, need not be built. This would not have pleased some Jewish contemporaries of John, like the writer of 2 Baruch, who had hopes for a new Jerusalem Temple.[1037] The coins minted by the Bar Kokhba government (132-5 C.E.), which depicts the Temple façade, also witnesses to that hope.[1038] Even more striking are the rabbis. "In their fervent hopes and beliefs that they would regain Jerusalem and the Temple Mount, they took pains to retain and clarify all the information that would be necessary to rebuild the Temple and restore its service."[1039] We can see a potential clash between those who hoped and planned for a rebuilt earthly Temple and those who claimed that a New Temple already existed. It is likely that FG was written, at least partly, to argue against the notion that a rebuilt earthly Temple was necessary.

(6) "I have always taught in the Temple" (Jn 18:20). In FG, Jesus does not teach outside of the synagogue or Temple.[1040] The Synoptic Gospels explicitly describe Jesus as teaching from village to village (Lk 13:22), by the sea (Mk 4:1), in a boat (Lk 5:3), on a mountain (Mt 5:2), on a level place (Lk 6:17), in synagogues (Mt 4:23), and in the Temple (Mt 26:55). But in FG, when Jesus is explicitly identified as teaching, he does so in a synagogue once (Jn 6:59) and in the Temple five times:

> Jn 7:14 "Jesus went up into the temple and began to teach."
> Jn 7:28 "Then Jesus cried out as he was teaching in the temple."
> Jn 8:2 "Early in the morning he came again to the temple. All the people came to him and he sat down and began to teach them.
> Jn 8:20 "He spoke these words while he was teaching in the treasury of the temple."
> Jn 18:20 "I have always taught in synagogues and in the temple, where all the Jews come together. I have said nothing in secret."

The Temple is the place where Jesus manifests himself to the world. In 7:26, in the midst of the Temple, the crowds say: "Behold he is speaking openly." And when Jesus leaves the Temple in 8:59, the narrator says, "Jesus *hid* (κρύπτω) himself and

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[1037] 2 Bar 6:1-9; 32:1-7; see comments by Nickelsburg and Stone (1991) 85. Various writers expressed hopes that a new and glorious Temple would be rebuilt in Jerusalem in the new age; cf. Ezek 40-48; Tob 14:5; 1 *Enoch* 90:29; *Jub.* 1:15-17.

[1038] Meyers (1992) 6.367.

[1039] Meyers (1992) 6.368.

[1040] Lieu (1999) 53.

went out of the temple" (NRSV).[1041] Strikingly, the glory of Jesus is never perceived in the Temple, but only by the disciples outside of its precincts (e.g., 1:14; 2:11).

(7) "They will destroy our Temple" (Jn 11:48). The conflict about who has authority over the Temple and the worship associated with it, which began with the *Temple cleansing*, comes into view throughout the Gospel. The tension becomes particularly acrimonious in Jn 5-11, which can be described as an extended trial narrative.[1042] FG does not have a formal Jewish trial as in Mark. Rather, John appears to have artistically spread the trial material over seven chapters (Jn 5-11) and thematically aligned it with festivals associated with the Temple—Passover (6:4), Tabernacles (7:2), and Dedication (10:22). Throughout the extended trial, the Temple and its Feasts provide the setting for a series of confrontations between Jesus and his opponents. What is remarkable is that this carefully crafted section culminates with the one and only gathering of the Sanhedrin mentioned by FG. In Jn 11:45-54, we find the Sanhedrin gathered in the Temple to discuss the future of Jesus. Through the voice of the high priest, Caiaphas, the Sanhedrin formally pronounces the death penalty on Jesus *in absentia*. Why did they condemn him? Interestingly, Jesus is not condemned because he claimed to be the Son of God—which is the formal charge *the Jews* brought before Pilate in Jn 19:7—rather, Jn 11:48 tells us that the Sanhedrin was afraid that Jesus would raise up followers and that the Romans would come and destroy both the Jewish nation and the Temple.[1043]

> "If we let him go on thus, every one will believe in him, and the Romans will come and destroy both our holy place and our nation." (Jn 11:48; RSV)

Jesus was perceived to be a threat to the Temple and, from what can be gathered from Jn 11:45-54, it was the motivating factor for sentencing him to death. This motive to kill Jesus looks back to the Temple cleansing incident where the disciples

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[1041] However, as Lieu (1999) 54-5 points out, there is some ambiguity. E.g., in 10:24, they demand, "If you are the Messiah, tell us plainly" (NRSV). They did not believe and so could not see. Only Jesus' disciples witnessed his glory (2:11; 17:6; cf. 21:1) and only they have the promise of the coming Paraclete (14:26; 15:26-27; 16:7-11). Rightly, Lieu says, "Jesus' *openness* is not transparent. It does not guarantee understanding and belief."

[1042] Harvey (1976).

[1043] In Mk 14:58 and Matt 26:61 describe false witnesses testifying that Jesus threatened the Temple; the closest thing to that is Matt 24:1-2 and Mk 13:1-2, where Jesus predicts the destruction of the Temple.

remembered the saying that "Zeal for your house will consume (kill) me" (2:17), which was the first hint that Jesus' death would be linked to his alleged threat to the Temple.

(8) "In my Father's house there are many dwelling places" (Jn 14:2). The final meal and discourse of Jesus extends from 13:1—17:26. In this context, Jesus prepares the disciples for his departure and extends to them this promise:

> In my Father's house (οἰκίᾳ) there are many dwelling places (μοναὶ πολλαί) (Jn 14:2).

This verse recalls the earlier use of "my father's house (οἶκον)" in Jn 2:16, where it was a reference to the Temple.[1044] On the one hand, the use of οἶκον (2:16) and οἰκία (14:2) resonates with typical Jewish understandings about the Temple, which was called the *House of the Lord* (בית יהוה) [1045] and perceived to be the very dwelling of God. On the other hand, Jesus' reference to the Temple as *my father's* house initiates an entirely new way of speaking about the Temple in personal and familial terms. Coloe argues that, in scripture, the phrase, *my father's house*, usually refers to a *group of people* who make up a household, including family members, servants, and even future descendants.[1046] Using language of this type, FG formulates a relational and personal way of understanding the Temple. In Jn 2:10-23, the image of the Temple shifts from the Temple-as-building (Jn 2:20) to the Temple-as-person (Jn 2:21). In Jn 14:2, the Johannine image of the Temple continues to develop, this time beyond a single person, Jesus, to a group of people in a household or family.

As Coloe contends, the reference to many *dwellings* (μοναὶ) in 14:2 is best understood in light of FG's use of the related verb, μένω (*to dwell* or *abide*), and noun, μονὴν (*dwelling*). In chapter 14, there are a series of *dwellings*. The Father *dwells* (μένων) with Jesus (14:10), the Paraclete *dwells* (μένει) with believers, the Father and Jesus make their *dwelling* (μονὴν) with the believer (14:23), and Jesus *dwells* (μένων) with his disciples (14:25). In each instance, the act of dwelling

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[1044] The following argument on Jn 14:2 is largely dependant on Coloe (2001) 160-64.

[1045] The phrase, בית יהוה, occurs 259 in the Hebrew Bible (e.g., Exod 23:19; 1 Sam 1:24; 1 Kgs 7:40; Isa 66:20).

[1046] Coloe (2001) 161.

involves the divine *descending* to the human realm. Taking this into consideration, the imagery of 14:2 is best understood as a series of interpersonal relationships made possible by divine indwelling of persons on earth, not of humans ascending into heaven above.[1047] In this way, the Johannine community is presented as the House(hold) of God, the living Temple.[1048]

(9) "If I have blasphemed, provide the evidence" (Jn 18:23). When scholars compare the Gospel accounts of the Jewish trial (or examination) of Jesus, they often overlooked that the issue of blasphemy is implicitly or explicitly also raised in FG (cf. Jn 18:23; Mk 14:64; Matt 26:65; Lk 23:71).[1049] FG refers to blasphemy during Jesus' conversation with Annas, the high priest, in Jn 18:23. Unfortunately, this verse is invariably translated in a way that obscures the reference to blasphemy. Take, for example, the RSV:

Jesus answered him, "If I have spoken wrongly, bear witness to the wrong; but if I have spoken rightly, why do you strike me?" (Jn 18:23; RSV).	ἀπεκρίθη αὐτῷ Ἰησοῦς, Εἰ κακῶς ἐλάλησα, μαρτύρησον περὶ τοῦ κακοῦ· εἰ δὲ καλῶς, τί με δέρεις; (UBS[4])

As we discussed earlier in § 4.3.3, the phrase, κακῶς λαλεῖν (*to speak wickedly*),[1050] functions as the adverbial form for κακολογέω (*to speak evil against* or *to curse*),[1051] both of which have overlapping synonymy with the term βλασφημέω. The *patient*[1052] of κακῶς λαλεῖν and κακολογέω is almost always a person or symbol of authority. Thus we find the following typical instances:[1053]

1. A warning not to *curse* (κακολογήσεις) God (LXX Exod 22:27a)
2. A warning not to *curse* (κακῶς ἐρεῖς) a leader (LXX Exod 22:27b).
3. A statement about *blaspheming* (κακῶς ἐρεῖτε) king and gods (LXX Isa. 8:21)
4. A reference to Nicanor *speaking wickedly* (κακῶς ἐλαλησεν) about the Temple (1 Macc 7:42)

[1047] We concur with Coloe (2001) 163.

[1048] Aune (1972) 130 states, "It is probable that in John 14:2 (and also 8:35) the term οἰκία (τοῦ πατρός) reflects the self-designation of the Johannine community."

[1049] E.g., see the comparison in Rowland (1985) 164-74.

[1050] See our analysis in § 4.3.3. Κακῶς λαλεῖν occurs six times in LXX (Exod 22:27; Lev 1:14, 20:9 (twice); Isa 8:21; 1 Macc 7:42) and only once in the NT (Jn 18:23). The phrase does not occur in Philo or Josephus.

[1051] See our analysis in § 4.3.3. Κακολογέω occurs six times in LXX (e.g., Exod 21:16 and 22:27), four times in NT (e.g., Mk 9:39), and twice in Josephus (*A.J.* 20.180 [twice]).

[1052] Regarding the term *patient*, see § 4.2.

[1053] See chapter 5 regarding LXX Exod 22:27 (§ 5.4) and chapter 10 for 1 Macc 7:42 (§ 10.2).

Since, as we argued in Part II, each of these instances can be understood as references to blasphemy, it is likely that the phrase κακῶς ἐλάλησα in Jn 18:23 also refers to *blasphemy.* In addition, Jesus also asks his accusers to *bear witness to the wrong* in Jn 18:23. If so, then we can paraphrase Jesus as saying, "If I have blasphemed, you provide testimony confirming it." In the present form of Jn 18:19-24, it appears as though Jesus insults Annas, the high priest, whereupon a guard hits Jesus and rebukes him for speaking improperly, which is followed by Jesus denying he has done any wrong. However, if Jesus is being accused of having just insulted the high priest, why does Jesus then say, "you (sg.) provide testimony" (μαρτύρησον), as if Jesus expects the guard or Annas to prove (by testimony) that Jesus has just insulted or blasphemed the priest. Another explanation is desirable.

It is possible that FG is drawing on traditions that originally included a scenario where witnesses were brought in to testify about some grievous fault of Jesus. In this regard, E.P. Sanders notes that there are several traditions that contain the charge that Jesus *threatened the temple.*[1054] One is in the trial scenes of both Mark and Matthew:

> Some stood up and gave false testimony against him, saying, "We heard him say, 'I will destroy this temple that is made with hands, and in three days I will build another, not made with hands.'" (Mk 14:57-58; NRSV)
>
> At last two [witness] came forward and said, "This fellow said, 'I am able to destroy the temple of God and to build it in three days.'" (Matt 26:60b-61; NRSV)

Both traditions emphasize that the testimony came from *false witnesses,* who claimed that Jesus *threatened to destroy the temple* and then *rebuild it.* What is striking is that the charge reappears elsewhere both in Mark and Matthew:

> Those who passed by derided him shaking their heads and saying, "Aha! You who would destroy the temple and build it in three days, save yourself and come down from the cross!" (Mk 15:29-30; NRSV; para. Matt 27:40).

We know that, according to Mark, Jesus predicted the destruction of the Temple (Mk 13:1f), which could have been misunderstood by Jesus' opponents as a

[1054] We follow E.P. Sanders (1985) 71-75 in much of the following argument, through he does not refer to Jn 18:23.

threat to destroy it. This appears to be supported by FG when Jesus is cleansing the Temple in Jn 2:13-22. After Jesus causes a ruckus in the Temple, *the Jews* demand a sign indicating his authority to do such a thing:

> Jesus answered them, "Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up." (Jn 2:19; NRSV).

This, of course, is a classic Johannine misunderstanding. *The Jews* think he is referring to the Jerusalem Temple (Jn 2:20), but his disciples, after Jesus' resurrection, know that he was referring to his body (Jn 2:21-22). There is historical reason, therefore, to argue that non-believing Jews thought that Jesus had threatened to destroy the Temple, something that Jewish-Christians fought to dispel. Turning again to Jesus' conversation with Annas, it is possible that there is a veiled reference to Jesus' alleged *blasphemy against the Temple.* If so, Jn 18:32 could be paraphrased as, "If I have blasphemed the Temple, where are your witnesses?

14.2.2 Themes about the Temple

(1) Overlexicalization and Relexicalization. FG uses a variety of terms for the Temple, which may reflect the overlexicalization of terms typical of an antisociety,[1055] including: *the temple* (τὸ ἱερον),[1056] *the sanctuary* (ὁ ναός),[1057] *the father's house* (ὁ οἶκος τοῦ πατρός),[1058] *the holy place* (ὁ τόπος),[1059] *the temple, that is, his body* (τοῦ ναοῦ τοῦ σώματος αὐτοῦ)[1060] and, possibly, the *true vine* (ἡ ἄμπελος ἡ ἀληθινη)[1061] and *the foundation* (ἡ καταβολὴ).[1062]

[1055] See the socio-linguistic study of M. A. K. Halliday (1978) 164-182, who devotes a chapter to the discussion of "antilanguage," "relexicalization," and "overlexicalization" with respect to subcultures. Also see Malina and Rohrbaugh (1998) 5, 7, who have adapted Halliday's insights to Johannine studies.

[1056] Jn 2:14, 15; 5:14; 7:14, 28; 8:2, 20, 59; 10:23; 11:56; 18:20.

[1057] Jn 2:19, 20, 21.

[1058] Jn 2:16 (twice), 17; cf. Jn 14:2 and *1 Enoch* 45:3.

[1059] Jn 11:48 (NRSV); cf. LXX Deut 12:11; 14:23; 16:11; 26:2 where ὁ τόπος refers to *the holy place* where offerings are brought to God and where his Name dwells.

[1060] The genitive τοῦ σώματος αὐτοῦ is in apposition to ναοῦ; see Bultmann (1971) 127, n. 5; Moloney (1998) 82.

[1061] Jn 15:1, 4, 5. The vine metaphor has been linked to a wide variety of meanings, including the Land of Israel, wisdom, the Messiah, the eucharistic, and, not least, the Temple; Burge (1994) 391-4. Pseudo-Philo *Liber Antiquitatum Biblicarum* XII.8-9 depicts Israel as the vine that links heaven, the earth, and the abyss. Since God planted Israel on His Holy Mountain, the imagery of the vine is necessarily linked to the Temple. Hayward (1996) 160-1 argues that "The vine symbol belongs firmly

FG's tendency to use many words for the same area of concern has been identified by Malina and Rohrbaugh as *overlexicalization*, the tendency to use common terms with new meaning for insiders (e.g., his body = New Temple) is identified as *relexicalization*. According to sociolinguistics, *overlexicalization* (the use of many synonyms for the same concept) and *relexicalization* (the use of common words, but with new meaning)[1063] are features of an antilanguage used by an antisociety, "a society that is set up within another society as a conscious alternative to it."[1064] People within an antisociety use *overlexicalization* and *relexicalization* to define themselves over against a dominant group. In § 3.2, we used Coser's theory of conflict to argue that the Johannine group was in a close relationship with a parent group, but in sharp and ongoing conflict with it even as FG was first written. The *overlexicalization* and *relexicalization* of Temple terms reinforces that conclusion and suggests that the use of temple-language by FG identifies a *point of friction* between the Johannine group and their non-believing Jewish counterparts.[1065]

(2) The Temple Feast of Passover. Since Jesus has been identified as a New Temple (2:21), it is not surprising to find John continuing to reveal Jesus' identity by comparing him to key worship practices of the Temple. This occurs most dramatically with the Temple Festivals. For example, FG refers to the Feast of Passover (πάσχα) more than any other NT writing.[1066] In fact, 11 out of 21 chapters of FG have the Passover as a setting.[1067] Passover was one of the three great pilgrimage Feasts of the Temple[1068] and was punctuated by the sacrifice of

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in the realm of beliefs about the Temple: if the author of *LAB* lived in the last days of the second Temple, he would have known, and possibly have seen, the golden vine which decorated the entrance to the sanctuary (Josephus *War* V.210-211; *Ant.* XV.395; *m. Middoth* 3.8)." Cf. Barker (1991) 103.

[1062] Jn 17:24. The term καταβολή is used by Aristeas 89 to refer to the foundation of the Temple. That foundation was viewed as the cosmic center of the universe, a place where heaven and earth unite and from which God controls the universe. See Hayward (1996) 8-10, 32, 166-7.

[1063] Regarding the use of these terms, see Malina and Rohrbaugh (1998) 4-15, Malina (1994) 167-82, esp. 175-78, and M. A. K. Halliday (1978) 164-82.

[1064] Halliday (1978) 164, which is quoted with approval by Malina and Rohrbaugh (1998) 7.

[1065] Malina and Rohrbaugh (1998) 5 write: "John speaks of ***believing in Jesus, following*** him, ***abiding in*** him, ***loving*** him, ***keeping his word, receiving*** him, ***having*** him, or ***seeing*** him. This kind of redundancy is what we mean by overlexicalization."

[1066] Of 29 NT occurrences, 10 are in FG, 7 in Lk, 5 in Mk, 4 in Mt.

[1067] Jn 2:13-22; 2:23—3:36; 6:4-71; 13:1—20:29.

[1068] Passover, Tabernacles, and Pentecost; see Deut 16:16; Haran (1985) 341-5.

Paschal lambs in the forecourt of the Temple.[1069] It is noteworthy, therefore, that FG correlates the slaughter of the Paschal lambs in Jn 19:14 with the very hour of Jesus' crucifixion in Jn 19:15.[1070] The Synoptic Gospels have Jesus eating the Passover meal followed by his crucifixion the next day. Not so with FG. Jesus does not eat the Passover meal; he *is* the Passover meal (to use Johannine exaggeration). It is not surprising, therefore, to hear Jesus say that "the bread that I will give for the life of the world is my flesh" (6:51); nor is it surprising that this saying comes from John 6, which appears to reflect themes drawn from a Passover *seder* using Exodus 16 and Psalm 78.[1071] Much more could be said about how Passover symbolism is appropriated by FG in witnessing to Jesus' identity.[1072] Nevertheless, it is sufficient to say that the Passover symbolism used by FG points to an ongoing concern by the Johannine community for the Temple, despite the fact that the Jerusalem Temple had been destroyed years before.

(3) The Temple Feast of Tabernacles. FG continues a focus on the Temple when it mentions the Feast of Tabernacles (σκηνοπηγία; 7:2) and the Feast of Dedication (ἐγκαίνια; 10:22). The Feast of Tabernacles forms the setting for chapters 7-8 and the Feast of Dedication is the setting for chapter 10. It is remarkable that FG is the only NT document to mention these Feasts, which may suggest that it was prompted by some situation facing the Johannine community, rather than inherited Christian tradition.[1073] In any case, as with the Passover traditions, FG draws on the rituals and symbols of Tabernacles and Dedication to reveal Jesus' identity.[1074]

If we look first at the Feast of Tabernacles, two rituals are significant. The first is a water-pouring ceremony that occurred on each of the seven days of Tabernacles. It is

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[1069] 2 Chron 30:15ff; Jub. 49:16, 20.

[1070] Jn 19:14; cf. 1:29, 36. See Barrett (1978) 545; Brown (1970) 883.

[1071] Guilding (1960) 58-68; Brown (1966) 277-80; Borgen (1981) passim; Lieu (1999) 65. If there are elements of a Passover *seder*, it would reflect a post-70 C.E. period when Passover celebrations had moved from the sacrificial setting of the Temple to a non-sacrificial atmosphere of the home or synagogue.

[1072] See Yee (1989) 48-69; Guilding (1960) 58-68.

[1073] This is *the criterion of uniqueness* for mirror reading a polemical text; see Barclay (1987) 85.

an elaborate ceremony where water is poured out on the altar of the Temple. [1075] It functioned as a reminder of the water God provided for Israel in the wilderness when Moses struck the rock (Ex 17:1-6). The ceremony was also linked with the coming of the LORD when, on that day, water would flow out from underneath the Temple threshold.[1076] Ezekiel foretells of the life-giving waters that would flow from the Temple and Jerusalem, the center of the world, and renew the earth.[1077] So, as FG tells the story, on the last day of the Feast of Tabernacles, Jesus stood up and shouted:

> "Let anyone who is thirsty come to me, and let the one who believes in me drink. As the scripture has said, 'Out of his heart shall flow rivers of living water'" (7:37-38).[1078]

For every Jew familiar with the traditions of Tabernacles, Jesus' announcement would have been like a thunderclap from heaven. Jesus declares another source of living water, a new rock from which water flows. It coheres with the notion that Jesus is a New Temple and, if so, then a new center of the world. A second significant ritual from the Feast of Tabernacles is the light service.[1079] At the end of the first day of Tabernacles, four very tall, golden candlesticks were set up in the Court of the Women, part of the Temple precincts. The Mishnah states that when the four candlesticks were lit, which represented God shining upon them, "there was not a courtyard in Jerusalem that did not reflect the light of the *Beth ha-She'ubah* (the House of Water Drawing)."[1080] Then, in a ceremony in the Temple courtyard, two priests would proclaim that their ancestors turned their backs to the Temple and worshipped the sun toward the east; "but as for us, our eyes are turned toward the

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[1074] A key feature of this annual celebration was setting up booths or temporary shelters in the courtyard of the Temple. Deut 16:13, 16; Lev 23:34, 42-43; the Feast of Ingathering in Ex 23:16 and 34:22; cf. *m. Sukkah.*

[1075] *m. Sukkah* 4:9 describes the process whereby water was taken from the pool of Siloam and ceremoniously carried back to the Temple altar where it was poured into one of two silver bowls. Into the other bowl, a priest would pour wine. Spouts from each bowl would then allow the water and wine to flow out on the alter. Yee (1989) 75.

[1076] *T. Sukkah* 3:3, 8; Isa 12:3; Exek 47:1-12; Zech 14:8, 16-19. See also Rev 22:1-2, which describes a river of water of life flowing from "the throne and the lamb." Beasley-Murray (1987) 113-4; Guilding (1960) 105-6.

[1077] Jerusalem as the center of the world, see Ezek 47:1-11; Ezek 38:12; *Jub* 8:19; *b. Sanh* 37a.

[1078] The translation is from Moloney (1998) 251. The punctuation, the meaning of κοιλία, and original text referred to in v. 38 is much debated. The question of punctuation concerns from whom the rivers of living water will flow; is it from the believer or from Christ? Barrett (1979) 327 and Bernard (1929) 282-3 favor the notion that the water flows from the believer; Beasley-Murray (1987) 114-6, Moloney (1998) 256, and Brown (1966) 320-3 favor the christological reading.

[1079] *m. Sukk.* 5:2-4.

[1080] *m. Sukk.* 5.3; Danby (1933) 179-180.

Lord."[1081] In the context of a Feast where the Temple courts became the light of Jerusalem, Jesus announces, "I am the light of the world" (8:12). Again, Jesus presents himself as an alternative, and a brighter one at that—he lights the world, not simply Jerusalem.

(4) The Temple Feast of Dedication. In turning to the Feast of Dedication, the same sort of appropriation of symbols occurs. The Feast of Dedication celebrated the rededication of the Temple after Antiochus had desecrated it. Antiochus IV, who called himself *Epiphanes* or *the Manifest (God)*,[1082] had sacked the Temple, stripped it of its wealth,[1083] tried to abolish all vestiges of Judaism and, as an act of final defiance, set up a pagan altar in the Temple itself.[1084] After Antiochus was defeated, Judas Maccabeus rebuilt and refurbished the sanctuary in 164 B.C.E. and instituted an annual Feast celebrating the rededicated Temple and the defeat of *the Manifest (God)*. When we turn to FG, within the context of the Feast of Dedication (10:22), we hear Jesus claim that he and the Father are one (Jn 10:30). Shortly thereafter, Jesus is accused of blasphemy, because he (like Antiochus), being only a man, is making himself to be God (10:33). In response, Jesus not only claims that the Father sent him, but *the Father dedicated him* (ὃν ὁ πατὴρ ἡγίασεν) (10:36). Much can be said about this passage, however, for our purposes, it is enough to note that, once again, Jesus has appropriated Temple symbolism for himself—it is not that the Jerusalem Temple is dedicated, rather Jesus, the New Temple is dedicated by the Father.

(5) Additional Temple motifs in FG. In addition to the points cited above, FG appears to allude to the Temple and Temple traditions in a number of other ways. For our purposes, it is sufficient to list these with little comment: (a) As we mentioned earlier, FG refers to Isaiah seeing the Glory of Jesus in Jn 12:41, an allusion his vision of the glory of Jesus/God enthroned high in the heavenly Temple (Isa. 6:1-5).[1085] (b) Throughout FG, there is a sustained focus on the glory of God and Jesus; Jesus glorifies God on earth (e.g., Jn 17:4) and, in turn, Jesus is glorified by God

[1081] *m. Sukk.* 5.4; Danby (1933) 180.
[1082] See § 9.5.
[1083] 1 Macc 1:20-28.
[1084] 1 Macc 1:59; cf. Dan 11:31.
[1085] See §13.4.2; cf. Kanagaraj (1998) 224-6.

(e.g., Jn 8:54). The language of *glory* recalls the glory of YHWH in the Temple.[1086] (c) There are frequent references to Jesus having God's Name (e.g., 17:11) and making God's Name known (e.g., 17:6, 26), which may allude to the divine Name placed in the Temple (Deut 12:5; 12:11; 16:11; 16:2-3). (d) Jesus' frequent uses of the absolute form of *I am* (e.g., Jn 8:58) may also be linked to the Temple. As Stauffer argues, the Hebrew, *Ani Hu* (*I am*), was a functional equivalent for the Divine Name and spoken sung out in praise in the Temple (*m. Sukk* 4:5).[1087] (e) The judgment motif in FG might also have brought up notions of the Temple, since judgment that takes place before the throne of God in the heavenly Temple (e.g., Jn 5:27). (f) On the matter of purification (καθαρός), which was required before entering the Temple, FG asserts that the only purification that matters comes through Jesus' washing (νίπτω) (Jn 13:4-12; cf. 15:4).

14.2.3 Summary

We have been arguing two things: First, according to FG, the significance and symbolism of the Temple has been transferred to the person of Jesus and, by association, to the Johannine community in a more limited sense. Second, the repeated references to the Temple (the criterion of *frequency*), the use of terms not used in other NT documents—like Feasts of Tabernacles and Dedication—and the appearance of antilanguage[1088] (the criterion of *uniqueness*), and the general evidence regarding Judaism in the aftermath of the Temple's destruction (the criterion of *historical plausibility*), indicate that the issue of the Temple was a *point of sensitivity* between the Johannine group and their non-believing Jewish counterparts.[1089]

[1086] See § 9.4; Hayward (1996) 16 observes that biblical tradition understands God's presence in the Temple as *glory* defined as the dazzling radiance of God that accompanies Israel (cf. Ex 40:34-38; Lev. 9:4, 6, 23; Num 14:10). FG uses δοξάζω 23 times, more than any other NT book. It primarily refers to the glorification or exaltation of God or Jesus (e.g., Jn 7:39; 8:54; 13:31; 17:1, 4, 5, 10). FG uses δόξα 19 times of which 15 refer to God or Jesus 15 times (e.g., Jn 1:14; 2:11; 5:44; 8:50, 54; 12:41, 43; 17:5, 22, 24).

[1087] Stauffer (1960) 142-59; see also the thorough study of *Ani Hu* by Williams (2000).

[1088] On "antilanguage," see pages 242-44 and footnote 1055.

[1089] On the criteria for mirror-reading a text, see § 3.4. Motyer (1997) 24-5 who has argued in a similar, but more limited form.

14.3 The Johannine blasphemy against the Temple

The evidence from FG convincingly shows that the Temple was more than simply an interest of the Johannine community; it was probably a *point of sensitivity* between the Johannine group and their non-believing Jewish counterparts. From amid all that the author of FG says about Temple, a portion of it indicates that FG's theology concerning the Temple would have been perceived as blasphemous by non-believing Jews, because it implicitly or explicitly *threatened the Temple* or *dishonored it.*

First, Jesus and the Johannine community were probably perceived as blasphemers because they threatened the Jerusalem Temple. Our *composite portrait* of blasphemy indicates that threats against the Temple counted as threats against God, whose Temple it was. As we argued earlier, in the mythology of the ancient Jewish world, aggression against the Temple endangered the stability of the world, the place where heaven and earth converge, and Israel's very election as a priestly nation.[1090] Threats to the Temple were grave offences.

Consider Nicanor who came to the great and holy Temple in pursuit of Judas and demanded that the priests turn him over. When Judas was not delivered to him, Nicanor was enraged and *stretched out his hand* and vowed, "I will level this shrine of God to the ground ... and build here a splendid temple for Dionysus" (2 Macc 14:33; NRSV). Nicanor was subsequently killed and literally hung as a public spectacle for all of Jerusalem to witness (2 Macc 30-35). That day, the thirteenth day of Adar, became a national day of observance (2 Macc 15:36; cf. *Ant.* 12.402ff.). We should note two things. First, Nicanor's *threat to destroy the Temple* is conjoined with a *declaration to build another* in its place. Second, as argued previously, the *outstretched hand* of Nicanor was an act of blasphemy. Menacing gestures against the Temple would have been interpreted as a threat from a competitive deity.

When consider the notoriety of Nicanor, that several strands of early Jewish tradition identifies speak of him as a blasphemer,[1091] that a special day of observance was established when he was executed, it is not a leap in the dark to suggest that the

[1090] See § 9.4.
[1091] See footnote 720 and our discussion of Nicanor and Antiochus .

Nicanor-like utterance of Jesus, "Destroy this Temple and in three days I will raise it" (Jn 2:19), would have sparked Maccabean-like reactions against *whoever* would express such a contemptible remark. Even without the *logion* in Jn 2:19, the Temple cleansing incident links Jesus with what appears to be a menacing gesture against it. As we argued above, non-believing Jews associated Jesus with some kind of threat to destroy the Temple, an association that FG itself indirectly substantiates (cf. Jn 2:15-16, 19; 11:48; possibly 18:23). In this way, Jesus and probably the Johannine community, who talked about another temple replacing the one in Jerusalem, were perceived to blaspheme the Temple.

Second, Jesus and the Johannine community were probably perceived to disparage and dishonor the (Jerusalem) Temple. The Temple was personified and viewed as a person.[1092] It had honor and could be insulted, violated, dishonored, and blasphemed. Recall Antiochus' torrent of *blasphemies* perpetrated against Jerusalem and the Temple (1 Macc 1:20-64; cf. § 9.2). What was remarkable was that the author of 1 Macc depicted Mattathias lamenting, not the vast array of atrocities committed by Antiochus, but the fate of the Temple—its sanctuary was given over to aliens (1 Macc 2:7), her glorious vessels were been taken (1 Macc 2:9), he says, "our holy place ... and our glory have been laid waste" (1 Macc 2:12) and, most striking of all, he announces that "Temple has become like a person without honor (ἄδοξος)" (1 Macc 2:8). The Jerusalem Temple, which was regarded by many (but not all) Jews as the one Temple for the one God, was something to be honored and revered. In dishonoring the Temple, one blasphemed its personnel, its priests, and the One who dwelled there, namely, God. Hence, it is possible, even likely that the Johannine community—in their commitment to Jesus as the New (only) Temple of God, in their transference of the Temple-symbolism and Temple-glory (honor) to Jesus—would have been viewed as *dishonoring the memory and future of the Jerusalem Temple.* They not only plundered the Temple of its glorious symbolism, but they left the memory of the Temple in ruins. For non-believing Jews committed to the Jerusalem Temple, people who propagated the temple theology of FG would have been blasphemous.

[1092] Malina and Rohrbaugh (1998) 79.

14.4 Conclusions

We have tried to demonstrate two things: First, FG places extraordinary emphasis on the Jerusalem Temple and the worship associated with it in order to contrast that with Jesus, who is the New Temple. The implication is that the Temple—Jerusalem or Jesus—was an obvious *point of sensitivity* for the writer of FG and, therefore, probably a *point of friction* between the Johannine community and other Jews. Second, we have argued that the Johannine community probably would have been perceived blasphemous for threatening and dishonoring the memory and the future of the Jerusalem Temple when they spoke of Jesus as the New (only) Temple and when they transferred the symbolism and glory (honor) of the Temple to Jesus.

CHAPTER 15
"THE ΙΟΥΔΑΙΟΙ ARE NOT OF GOD"

We have argued that blasphemy in early Judaism may be characterized as a verbal or non-verbal attack on God, God's Temple, or God's chosen leaders. In the previous two chapters, we focused on the perception that the Johannine community blasphemed God and the Jerusalem Temple. In this chapter, we address whether FG and the theology or ideology that it reflects would have been perceived as an attack on the religious leaders of Israel. Specifically, we ask whether non-believing Jews would have perceived the Johannine polemic against the Ἰουδαῖοι as blasphemous.

15.1 The problem of the Ἰουδαῖοι

FG's invective against *the Jews* is widely recognized as some of the most caustic polemic in the NT. Sandmel writes, "John is widely regarded as either the most anti-Semitic or at least the most overtly anti-Semitic of the gospels."[1093] We need only look at the use of John throughout history, from Chrysostom to Luther to Nazi Germany.[1094] In this century, the first page of a children's picture-book published in Nazi Germany has the slogan, *Der Vater der Juden ist der Teufel*, an obvious allusion to Jn 8:44 where Jesus says to *the Jews*, "You are from your father the devil, and you choose to do your father's desires."[1095] It is not surprising, therefore, that some scholars identify Johannine passages like Jn 8:44-47 as "the road to Auschwitz."[1096]

Even with efforts to dampen or explain why FG uses such a harsh tone, FG lends itself to anti-Semitic and anti-Jewish interpretations. A major reason for this involves FG's distinct use of the term οἱ Ἰουδαῖοι, which can be translated as either *the Judeans* (stressing the ethnic-geographic connotation) or *the Jews* (stressing the

[1093] Sandmel (1978) 101.
[1094] Motyer (1997) 2-3.
[1095] Motyer (1997) 1.
[1096] Freudmann (1994) 267. Ruether (1974) 28, 116 argues that "there is no way to rid Christianity of its anti-Judaism," because the roots of Christianity go back to the "dispute between Christianity and Judaism over the messiahship of Jesus."

religious-cultural connotation).[1097] As we will see, what FG says about the Ἰουδαῖοι can sound harsh and anti-Semitic. The harsh tone is amplified by the fact that FG uses the term οἱ Ἰουδαῖοι more frequently than all the other Gospels combined.[1098] Both the harsh tone and frequent use of Ἰουδαῖοι signal a *point of friction*[1099] between the Johannine community and their non-believing Jewish counterparts.

In this chapter, we will address: (1) the literary *function* of the Ἰουδαῖοι in FG, (2) the historical *reference* or identity of the Ἰουδαῖοι,[1100] (3) the socio-historical situation that evoked FG's use of the term Ἰουδαῖοι, and (4) whether non-believing Jews would have understood FG's use of the Ἰουδαῖοι as blasphemous.

15.2 The function of the Ἰουδαῖοι in FG

The role or function of the Ἰουδαῖοι concerns how they are portrayed within the narrative of FG without reference to historical persons behind the text.[1101] A character sketch of the Ἰουδαῖοι describing what role they play in the narrative, reveals their function.[1102] Here, we can only give a sketch of some of the characterists of the Ἰουδαῖοι according to FG:[1103]

1. At least some Ἰουδαῖοι are inhabitants of Ἰουδαία (*Judea*) and, therefore, can be called Judeans (e.g., Jn 7:1).[1104] In fact, when the term Ἰουδαῖοι is used to

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[1097] On the difficulty translating Ἰουδαῖοι, see Lowe (1976) and Meeks (1975) 182.

[1098] The adjective, Ἰουδαῖος, occurs 71 times in FG, 68 in the plural form. In contrast, Matthew uses it five times; Mark, six times; Luke, five times. Only Acts uses it more frequently (79 times).

[1099] See Motyer (1997) 46-57.

[1100] The questions of *function* and *reference* have structured the discussion about the Ἰουδαῖοι in FG since Ashton's seminal article in 1985, reprinted in Ashton (1994) 36-70. Cf. Ashton (1991) 131-7, Smiga (1992) 157-71, Kysar (1993) 113-27, and Motyer (1997) 46-57.

[1101] Ashton (1994) 53-54 uses *function* and *reference* in a way similar to Frege's distinction between *sense* and *reference*. The *sense* of a word concerns the concept indicated by the term and is closely related to its lexical definition(s). A word does not carry all of it *senses* in each passage; rather, its *sense* is limited or determined by the context. In contrast, the *referent* is the actual thing to which the word points. Thus, it is possible that the *sense* of a term may be clear, but have no *referent* (e.g., *the talking horse*).

[1102] On the characterization of Ἰουδαῖοι, see Culpepper (1983) 125-32; Powell (1990) 51-67.

[1103] Kysar (1993) 114-7.

[1104] Jn 7:1; 11:7-8; 11:54 (cf. 11:17). Two texts may be exceptions (Jn 6:41, 52). See Ashton (1994) 49-51 and Lowe (1976) 101-30.

describe non-authority figures in FG, it is found thirty-six times in a Judean context, but only twice in a Galilean context (Jn 6:41, 52).[1105]

2. The narrator does not identify with the Ἰουδαῖοι and distances readers from them. This is accomplished with phrases like "the feast of the Jews" (not "*our* feast")[1106] and "your law" (not "*our* law"),[1107] by explaining Aramaic and Hebrew words and customs as if the reader was an outsider,[1108] and by presenting the Ἰουδαῖοι as if they were an alien group from Jesus and the disciples.[1109] Most importantly, distancing the reader from the Ἰουδαῖοι is accomplished by depicting them as opponents of Jesus, who is the hero of FG. The Ἰουδαῖοι not only misunderstand Jesus,[1110] they oppose him[1111] and seek to kill him.[1112]

3. Furthermore, the Ἰουδαῖοι are characterized as unfaithful to the Torah (Jn 7:19), children of the devil (Jn 8:44), ignorant of scripture (Jn 5:39), not listening to Moses (5:45-47), and idolatrous (Jn 5:44; 19:15).

4. The φαρισαῖοι (*pharisees*) and the ἀρχιερεῖς (*high priests*) are distinct sub-groups within the Ἰουδαῖοι[1113] and together they function as leaders and authority figures,[1114] though at one point the Pharisees are distinguished from certain unnamed ἀρχόντοι (*rulers*) who believe.[1115] As a sub-group within the Ἰουδαῖοι, the φαρισαῖοι (*pharisees*) are often interchangeable with Ἰουδαῖοι.[1116]

5. The φαρισαῖοι (*pharisees*) and the ἀρχιερεῖς (*high priests*) sharply oppose,[1117] seek to apprehend,[1118] and try to kill Jesus.[1119] In return, Jesus describes them as blind

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[1105] So Lowe (1976) 122.
[1106] Jn 2:13; 5:1; 6:4; 7:2; 11:55.
[1107] Jn 8:17; 10:34.
[1108] Jn 2:6; 4:9; 19:40, 42; cf. Also Jn 1:38, 41-42.
[1109] Jn 11:8; 13:13; 18:20, 36.
[1110] Jn 2:20-21; 3:4-10; 6:41; 8:57.
[1111] Jn 2:18; 6:41; 7:13, 35; 8:48, 57, 59; 9:22; 19:7, 12, 38; 20:19.
[1112] 5:16-18; 7:1; 8:59; 10:31, 33, 39; 11:8; 18:12
[1113] Jn 7:32, 35; 19:21.
[1114] Jn 7:32, 45; 11:47, 57; 18:3.
[1115] Jn 12:42.
[1116] Compare Jn 1:19 & 1:24; 7:32 & 7:35; 8:13 & 8:22; 9:13-16 & 9:19; 9:22 & 12:42.
[1117] Jn 4:1; 8:13; 12:42.

guides and false leaders.[1120] FG also gives the impression that the φαρισαῖοι (*pharisees*) and the ἀρχιερεῖς (*high priests*) are solely responsible for Jesus' arrest, trial, and death.[1121] It appears as if Pilate hands Jesus over to the ἀρχιερεῖς (*high priests*) for execution,[1122] though στρατιῶται (*Roman soldiers*) exact the penalty.[1123]

6. Ironically, one gets the impression that the Ἰουδαῖοι should be differentiated from John the Baptist,[1124] the Galileans,[1125] the crowds in Jerusalem,[1126] the parents of the blind man,[1127] the Ephraimites,[1128] Martha,[1129] the disciples,[1130] and Joseph of Arimathea.[1131] It is puzzling why the narrator never tells the reader that these groups or individuals are the Ἰουδαῖοι too.

7. Further ambiguity is added when we read that Jesus himself is a Ἰουδαῖος[1132] (Jn 4:9; 18:35) and that salavation is from the Ἰουδαῖοι (Jn 4:22). Jesus is even called ὁ βασιλεύς τῶν Ἰουδαίων (*the king of the Jews*) seven times.[1133] Furthermore, certain Ἰουδαῖοι are neutral inquirers or admirers of Jesus,[1134] while others even believe in him.[1135] Even Nicodemus, a leader of the Ἰουδαῖοι, defends Jesus' rights and eventually helps bury him.[1136] The Ἰουδαῖοι are deeply divided on the issue of Jesus.[1137]

[1118] Jn 7:32.
[1119] Jn 5:18; 7:1; 8:59; 10:31, 9; 11:46-53.
[1120] Jn 9:40-41 and the discourse of 10:1-18.
[1121] Jn 18:3, 12, 19ff, 31, 38-40; 19:4-8, 12-16. Cf. Kysar (1993) 116 and Granskou (1986) 214.
[1122] Jn 19:15-16.
[1123] Jn 19:23.
[1124] Jn 1:19.
[1125] Jn 4:43-45.
[1126] Jn 7:13; 12:17.
[1127] Jn 9:18.
[1128] Jn 11:54.
[1129] Jn 11:19, 31.
[1130] Jn 13:33.
[1131] Jn 19:38.
[1132] Jn 4:9; 18:35.
[1133] Jn 18:3, 39; 19:3, 14, 19, & 21 (twice). Jesus is called, ὁ βασιλεύς τοῦ Ἰσραήλ, twice (1:47; 12:13).
[1134] Jn 7:15; 10:24; 11:36.
[1135] Jn 8:31; 11:45; 12:11.
[1136] Jn 7:50-51; 19:39.
[1137] Jn 10:19; (cf. 1:11-12; 7:43; 9:9, 16).

8. The religious commitments of the Ἰουδαῖοι are also severely criticized. From the perspective of the implied author of FG, the Judaism of the Ἰουδαῖοι falls desperately short of the ideal Judaism of true *Israel* (Ἰσραήλ).[1138] Somehow—and scholars are divided on this issue—Jesus is presented as *correcting*, *reinterpreting*, or *abrogating* the Judaism of the Ἰουδαῖοι.[1139]

Although the irregular use of Ἰουδαῖοι undermines any one-dimensional explanation, it is hard to deny that, on the whole, the Ἰουδαῖοι have a negative role to play in FG. In this regard, Bultmann and scholars[1140] contend that the Ἰουδαῖοι function as *representatives of unbelief* and should be distinguished from *historical Jews*.[1141] However, overemphasizing the *function* of the Ἰουδαῖοι has led scholars to minimize, even deny, any historical *reference*.[1142] Nevertheless, the historical question cannot be dodged: Why was *that term*—a term widely used in the first century—used and not another?

15.3 The reference of the Ἰουδαῖοι

This leads to the issue of the historical identity or *referent* of the Ἰουδαῖοι. To whom did the term refer at the time FG was written? Three options have emerged.

15.3.1 All Jews

According to Cohen, who has carried out an extensive philological study on the term Ἰουδαῖοι, the (English) term 'Jews' has religious-cultural connotations, but "never

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[1138] Pancaro (1974-75) 398-403 argues that FG presents a sharp contrast between the Johannine community as the true *Israel* (Ἰσραήλ), of whom Nathanael is a symbolic figure (Jn 1:47), and a false Israel, of whom the Ἰουδαῖοι represent. The contrast between true *Israel* (Ἰσραήλ) and people from *Judea* (Ἰουδαία) is also made by the Damascus Document, which prefers the self-designation of *Israel* (CD 3.19) and who will "no more consort with the house of Judah" (4.11).

[1139] Smiga (1992) 11-23.

[1140] Moloney (1998) 10-11; Ashton (1991) 134; Dahl (1986) 126; Culpepper (1983) 125-31; D. Moody Smith (1990a) 77; Trites (1976) 79.

[1141] Bultmann (1971) 86 and 87.

[1142] Fortna (1974) 95 argues that John "is not finally concerned with Judaism itself as a historical phenomenon alongside Christianity, so much as with the human condition." Culpepper (1983) 125 writes, "It should be clear that we are no more concerned with the 'historical' Jews [in FG] than with the historical Jesus." Culpepper (1998) 45 identifies the referent of Ἰουδαῖοι as *the Judeans*.

has geographic meaning."[1143] He defines 'Jews' as those who venerate "the God of the Judaeans, the God whose temple is in Jerusalem (the capital of Judaea)."[1144] With this in mind, in our judgment FG never uses of the term Ἰουδαῖοι to refer to 'all Jews.' FG has used Ἰουδαῖοι with a much more limited historical referent.

15.3.2 The Judeans

According to Cohen, a Ἰουδαῖος is first and foremost "a Judean—a member of the Judaean people or nation (*ethnos* in Greek, or a similar term) living in the ethic homeland of Judaea (*Ioudaia* in Greek)."[1145] Thus the use of term Ἰουδαῖοι in FG could refer to Judeans, people from the land of Judea. A major proponent of this view is Malcom Lowe who, supported by others, marshals two types of evidence. [1146]

First, according to Lowe, historical evidence suggests that the term Ἰουδαῖοι should be translated 'Judeans' because is had regional-geographical connotations during the first-century.[1147] After examining ancient sources, Lowe concludes that the primary meaning of Ἰουδαῖοι was geographical but, among Gentiles and Diaspora Jews, the word had a secondary religious meaning.[1148] Josephus states that the Ἰουδαῖοι derived their name from the tribe of Judah and that, from the time the exiles returned from Babylon, both they and the country gained that name (*A.J.* 11.173). Furthermore, Josephus reports that the Ἰουδαῖοι rebuilt the Temple in Jerusalem

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[1143] So Cohen (1999) 69.

[1144] Cohen (1999) 105.

[1145] Cohen (1999) 71; supported by Dunn (1999) 183, Meeks (1975) 182; Lowe (1976) *passim.*

[1146] See Lowe (1976) 101-30; see also Dodd (1963) 242; Meeks (1975) 182-3; Fortna (1988) 310-11; Malina and Rohrbaugh (1998) 44-6. Ashton's 1985 article (1994) 49-51 is sympathetic to Lowe's thesis, whereas Ashton (1991) 132-4 is less so.

[1147] Lowe (1976) 104-5 provides several strands of evidence and rationale. On the one hand, Josephus uses Ἰουδαῖοι in a *religious-ethnic* sense when he differentiates Ἰουδαῖοι from Gentiles. On the other hand, Josephus uses Ἰουδαῖοι in a *geographical-national* sense to designate inhabitants of Judea; e.g., see *A.J.* 18.88; *Ag. Ap.* 2.8 (cf. 1.252); *Life* 346, 391. In a most instructive text—*A.J.* 17.254ff—Josephus switches between the two different senses. First, he describes the Galileans, Idumeans, and people from Jericho and Perea celebrating Pentecost in Jerusalem, where they are joined by *the Judeans themselves* (αὐτοὶ Ἰουδαῖοι). Then, he describes the Romans attacking the crowd of Ἰουδαῖοι, which should be translates *the Jews*, because it refers to the whole crowd of Galileans, Idumeans, Judean, and others who have gathered to celebrate Passover.

[1148] Lowe (1976) 103-7 draws from 1 and 2 Maccabees, Josephus, the Mishna, Strabo, Dio Cassius, the Talmud, and Pompeius Trogus. Following K. G. Kuhn's TNDT article on Ἰσραήλ, Lowe (1976) 106-7 argues that the name Ἰσραήλ was a typical religious self-designation among Jews in

(*A.J.* 11.84) and were powerful enough to exclude the local Samaritans (*A.J.* 11.19-30-30, 84-8), which Ezra identifies as the *people of the land* (עמ האר) (Ezra 4:4). Josephus' description of the Ἰουδαῖοι sounds similar to that of FG's. In both cases, the Ἰουδαῖοι operate out of Jerusalem, center on the Temple, and view *the crowd* (ὄχλος = עמ האר) as ignorant of the Torah and cursed (Jn 7:49).[1149] According the Lowe and others, ancient testimony is fairly consistent in this regard. During the first-century, the Ἰουδαῖοι referred to people who either lived in the territory of Judea or could trace their origins and religious customs to Judea.[1150] Lowe contends that it was only after the Bar-Kochba revolt, when most of the Jewish population was eliminated or expelled from Judea, that the geographic connotation of Ἰουδαῖοι began to lose its force and the religious sense became predominant. Lowe's contention that a decisive semantic shift occurred relatively late, must now be weighed against the recent findings of Cohen, who concluded that

> All occurrences of the term *loudaios* before the middle or end of the second century B.C.E. should be translated not as 'Jew,' a religious term, but as 'Judaean,' an ethnic-geographic term. In the second half of the second century B.C.E. the term *loudaios* for the first time is applied even to people who are not ethnic or geographic Judaeans but who either have come to believe in the God of the Judaeans (i.e., they have become "Jews") or have joined the Judaen state as allies or citizens (i.e., they have become "Judaeans" in a political sense).[1151]

Thus, Cohen's study suggests that the semantic shift began to occur about two centuries before the Bar-Kochba revolt and, by the first-century, Cohen provides some evidence that the term Ἰουδαῖος had acquired a religious-cultural meaning.[1152] Still Cohen largely agrees with Lowe that the term Ἰουδαῖος had a primary ethnic-geographical meaning and a secondary religious-cultural meaning.[1153]

Palestine, whereas Ἰουδαῖοι had geographical connotations. In contrast, the self-designation of Diaspora Jews was Ἰουδαῖοι, since they were known as such among the Gentiles.

[1149] See Ashton (1994) 69-70.

[1150] Meeks (1975) 182; Cohen (1999) 71-78; Lowe (1976) 106-7, esp. 105, n. 17, cites Dio Cassius (late 3rd cent.) *R. Hist.* XXXVII, xvi.5-xvii.1 as reporting that Palestine was called Ἰουδαία and that Ἰουδαῖοι referred to either inhabitants of Judea or was applied to *other nations* (ἀλλοεθνεῖς) who adhered to *their customs* (τὰ νόμιμα αὐτῶν).

[1151] Cohen (1999) 70.

[1152] Cohen (1999) 78-81. E.g., Cohen cites, among others, Josephus' account of the conversion of the royal house of Adiabene (*A.J.* 20.38-39).

[1153] Cohen (1999) 3, 70.

Second, Lowe argues on internal grounds that οἱ Ἰουδαῖοι should be translated *the Judeans* throughout FG.[1154] The clearest evidence comes from Jn 7:1 and Jn 8:7-8 where the Ἰουδαῖοι are obviously the inhabitants of the region of Ἰουδαία (*Judea*).[1155] Lowe also shows that the often repeated phrases, ἡ ἑορτὴ τῶν Ἰουδαίων and ὁ βασιλεὺς τῆς Ἰουδαίων, can be translated as *the feast of the Judeans* and *the king of the Judeans* repectively.[1156] Finally, Lowe marshals more than forty passages to argue that whenever Ἰουδαῖοι is used to refer to *crowds of people* or to *authorities that oppose Jesus*, Judean crowds and Judean authorities are denoted.[1157]

Lowe's position is not without weaknesses. First, some instances of Ἰουδαῖοι in FG do not denote *Judeans* unambiguously; for example, there seem to be Galilean Ἰουδαῖοι (6:41, 52) and the Temple is where πάντες οἱ Ἰουδαῖοι συνέρχονται (*all the Jews gather*)(18:20). Second, several uses of Ἰουδαῖοι could be translated as either *Jews* or *Judeans*, which Lowe admits. A third, and substantial, criticism comes from Ashton who argues that Lowe's thesis overemphasizes local or tribal enmity, which obscures the specifically religious nature of the antagonism between Jesus and the Ἰουδαῖοι.[1158] While some degree of *geographical* or local rivalry is apparent between Galileans and Judeans (Jn 4:9 and 7:45-52), Ashton argues that it is not an adequate explanation for the intense *religious* rivalry witnessed in FG. As a result, Ashton prefers to translate οἱ Ἰουδαῖοι as *the Jews* rather than *the Judeans.* Ashton recognizes that prior to C.E. 135, Ἰουδαῖοι had *both* geographical and religious connotations,[1159] but argues that the uniquely religious valence placed on the term by FG suggests that the term refers to "a particular religious group ... which might plausibly be regarded as the chief target of the evangelist's resentment."[1160]

[1154] So Lowe (1976) 115-9; however, he admits there are two exceptions (Jn 4:9, 22) where Ἰουδαῖοι denotes *Jews*, not *Judeans* (124-6), and a third possible exception (Jn 18:20) (129).

[1155] Cf. 1 Thes 2:14 and *J. Ant.* XVIII, 2, which describes Coponius and Quirinius arriving in τὴν Ἰουδαίαν to rule over and evaluate the property of the Ἰουδαῖοι.

[1156] Jn 2:13; 5:1; 6:4; 7:1; 11:55 and Jn 18:33, 39; 19:3, 19, 21 (twice). Lowe (1976) 115-9.

[1157] Lowe (1976) 121-4.

[1158] So Ashton (1994) 133-4.

[1159] Ashton (1991) 152-3.

15.3.3 Religious leaders

The term Ἰουδαῖοι in FG could refer to a certain group of *religious authorities.* Urban von Wahlde has been the most influential proponent of this view. Von Wahlde argues that when the term is used in the "characteristically Johannine way"—*when it refers to people hostile to Jesus*—it refers to certain *Jewish authorities.*[1161] Von Wahlde concludes that of the 71 times Ἰουδαῖοι is used in FG, 38 instances refer to people who are hostile to Jesus. When von Wahlde looks at these 38 occurrences, he raises an important question: Do these occurrences of Ἰουδαῖοι refer to common Jews and Jewish authorities (which suggests FG is anti-Semitic) or do they refer to Jewish authorities alone (which suggests FG is engaged in intra-Jewish debate)? Von Wahlde concludes that 36 of the 38 occurrences refer to *Jewish authorities*[1162] and the remaining two can be dismissed as the product of redactional activity.[1163] Unfortunately, in our judgment, von Wahlde's analysis is flawed. From the outset he focuses on the term Ἰουδαῖοι, without looking at synonyms. In this way, he overlooks FG's report that *many authorities believed* (ἐκ τῶν ἀρχόντων πολλοί ἐπίστευσαν) (12:42). From the outset he eliminates the so-called *neutral use* of Ἰουδαῖοι.[1164] By eliminating the so-called *neutral uses*, some of which are strikingly positive (e.g., 11:45), von Wahlde fails to acknowledge that the *neutral use* of Ἰουδαῖοι also shapes the meaning of the "charateristically Johannine use" since, after all, both uses lie side-by-side throughout the Gospel.[1165] This is a design flaw in von Wahlde's analysis and it becomes apparent when he discusses 14 instances of Ἰουδαῖοι who express hostility toward Jesus and yet there is *nothing* in the context to indicate that they are authorities.[1166] In dealing with these instances, von Wahlde argues that because "there is no evidence to indicate that the people are the common

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[1160] Ashton (1991) 136 identifies that group as those who, in the aftermath of the destruction of the temple in 70 C.E., laid the foundation for what we now call Judaism.

[1161] Von Wahlde (1982) 33-60; see also Brown (1966) lxxi and (1979) 41; Barrett (1978) 172; Beasley-Murray (1987) lxxxix; D. Moody Smith (1990a) 82; Ashton (1991) 136, 151-2; Dunn (1991) 157; Kysar (1993) 118; Ridderbos (1997) 231.

[1162] See the tally in von Wahlde (1993) 74, n. 5.

[1163] Jn 6:41, 52.

[1164] Von Wahlde eliminates 33 (of 71) uses of Ἰουδαῖοι that he believes refer to religious customs, the land of Judea, individual Jews, Jews who are not hostile to Jesus, and references to stereotyped phrases like *king of the Jews.* von Wahlde (1982) 46.

[1165] For similar criticisms of von Wahlde, see Dunn (1999) 196-98 & Motyer (1997) 52.

[1166] Jn 7:1, 11; 8:22, 48, 52, 57; 10:24, 31, 33; 11:8; 13:33; 18:31, 38; 19:7.

people," they must be references to authorities.[1167] This is an argument from silence. Nevertheless, von Wahlde's analysis contributes one very important insight—the Ἰουδαῖοι that are hostile to Jesus in FG are usually *religious authorities.* It suggests that the opponents of the Johannine Jews were certain Judean religious authorities.

15.3.4 Implications

Regarding the historical referent of Ἰουδαῖοι, Ashton is right to point out that any translation of the term will be misleading in some degree.[1168] Still, based on the analysis of Lowe, and now supported by Cohen,[1169] it is likely that the first readers of FG would have understood the term Ἰουδαῖοι predominantly as a reference to *Judeans*, people from Judea. Because the term *Judean* encompasses both an ethnic-geographical (primary meaning) and religious-cultural (supplementary meaning) and because it prevents confusion with the modern notion of *Jew* and *Jewishness*, as a general principle, the term Ἰουδαῖοι in FG should be translated *Judeans.* In addition, FG often uses the term, Ἰουδαῖοι, to refer a certain group of religious (Judean) authorities that violently oppose Jesus and his disciples, including the Johannine group.[1170] Thus, when FG uses the term, Ἰουδαῖοι, there are three potential historical referents—Jews (people linked to the religious practices of Judeans, whether in Judea or not), Judeans, and Judean authorities.

Regarding the function of the Ἰουδαῖοι within FG, we have seen how they represent unbelief and oppositon to Jesus and his disciples. The Ἰουδαῖοι align with the negative side—the world, darkness, death, and judgment.[1171] Alignment of the Ἰουδαῖοι with the negative side infuses the Ἰουδαῖοι with a cosmic or mythic significance that overwhelms the historical reference.[1172] The Johannine community probably knew certain Judean religious leaders to whom they could have pointed to as the *historical Ἰουδαῖοι.* Nevertheless, when the composite portrait of the

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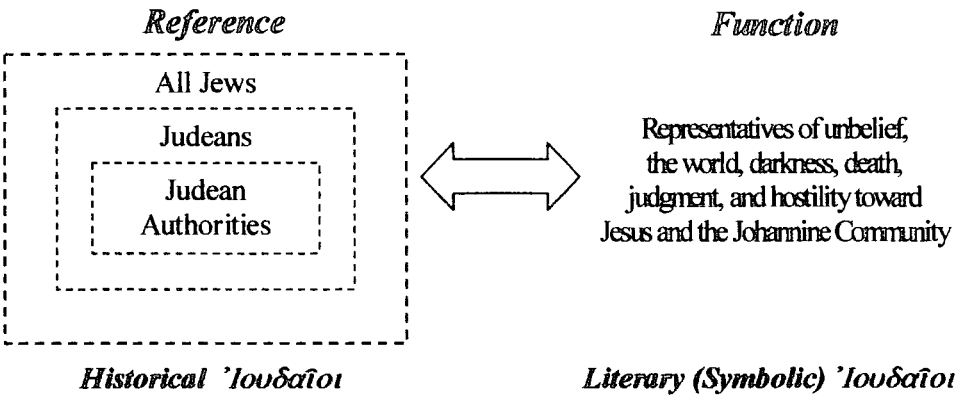
[1167] Von Waldhe (1982) 48.
[1168] Ashton (1991) 39.
[1169] Cohen (1999) 69-106.
[1170] Brown (1979) 41 writes, "John deliberately uses the same term for the Jewish authorities of Jesus' time and for the hostile inhabitants of the synagogue in his own time."
[1171] These are the negative aspects of four dualisms identified by Ashton (1991) 206-26.
[1172] Smiga (1992) 168-9.

'Ιουδαῖοι is drawn from the pages of FG, when the three referential levels merge into a unified character that represents the world, darkness, death, and judgment, the *historical 'Ιουδαῖοι* vanish and a non-historical, symbolic *literary 'Ιουδαῖοι* emerges. The relationship may be diagramed as follows:[1173]



Although FG itself is thoroughly Jewish in what it assumes to be good and true, and even though the earliest members of the Johannine community saw themselves as faithful Jews, FG cannot escape the charge of being anti-Judean on the historical level nor, for many modern readers, anti-Jewish on the symbolic level. However, a historical-critical reading, which acknowledges the reality of competing Judaic systems in the first-century, dispels any notion that FG is anti-Jewish in the modern sense of the term.

15.4 The socio-historical context

The complex usage of 'Ιουδαῖοι in FG is probably explained by the difficult socio-historical situation in which the Johannine community lived. As we have previously argued (§ 3.1), there is widespread agreement that FG was written within the context of a dispute with nascent Yavnean Judaism.[1174] When the Romans laid siege to Jerusalem, Yohanan ben Zakkai escaped and went to Yavneh where, sometime later, he established an academy for Torah study. At Yavneh, a major concern for Yohanan

[1173] This is a substantially modified version of the diagram in Smiga (1992) 162.
[1174] Dahl (1986) 99-119, esp. 111; Martyn (1979) *passim*; Freyne (1985) 125.

and the band of Judeans that followed him was the consolidation and reinterpretation of Judaism without the Temple.[1175] The reforms instituted by the Yavnean academy touch on concerns raised by FG, including the issues of Torah, Temple, festivals, and forgiveness of sins, but in different ways (§ 3.1.2). In this way, FG and the Johannine community are addressing vital issues confronting Jews in the aftermath of the destruction of the Temple and, possibly, going head-to-head against the Yavnean authorities, who have been characterized as closing their ranks, consolidating their power, and absorbing (or eliminating) competitive forms of Judaism.[1176] With this potential context in mind, the polemic against the Ἰουδαῖοι in FG may be understood as a polemic against certain 'Judean religious authorities' aligned with Yavneh or a similar group. If so, then the Johannine group and the Judeans were locked in combat over who controlled the heritage of the Jewish religion without the Temple.[1177]

We have also argued (§ 3.2) that the Johannine group was in close relationship with their non-believing Jewish or Judean counterparts and that, according to Coser, explains the intensity of the polemic against the Ἰουδαῖοι. When FG was written, both groups were fighting to establish their identities and draw boundaries between those in and those outside their respective groups. Because conflict helps establish and maintain group boundaries (§ 3.2.2), we can understand that the verbal and non-verbal attacks that passed between the Johannine group and their Judean counterparts functioned as part of the process that strengthened and consolidated their identities. Each group slandered the other, labeled the "other" as deviants, and occasionally took up violent measures. Religious fanaticism of this sort, with mutual recriminations between rival groups, was not uncommon in first-century Palestine or, for that matter, much of the ancient Hellenistic world.[1178]

Thus, the socio-historical context suggests that there were two religious groups locked in bitter conflict, concerned with who were the rightful heirs to Israel's inheritance, and using every honorable (from their perspective) means necessary to

[1175] Yee (1989) 16-21.
[1176] W. D. Davies (1964) 272-86, Manns (1988) passim, and Pancaro (1974-5) 401.
[1177] Dunn (1993) 200.

ensure their survival. Issuing sharp invectives toward one another was apparently one of the means they used—*the Ἰουδαῖοι are of the Devil* (8:44), *Jesus is a Samaritan and has a demon* (Jn 8:48), *the Ἰουδαῖοι are idolatrous* (Jn 19:15), and *Jesus is a blasphemer* (10:33).

15.5 The Johannine blasphemy against the Ἰουδαῖοι

In an effort to consolidate their identity over against what appears to be a Yavnean influenced synagogue, the author of FG and the Johannine community wanted the negative sentiment that was directed toward the opponents of Jesus *to be transferred* to those persecuting the Johannine group. One of the mechanisms of transference was the alignment of the *symbolic Ἰουδαῖοι*—the *Ἰουδαῖοι* of devilish origin and mythic proportion—with the *referential Ἰουδαῖοι*, the Judean religious authorities who opposed, expelled, and persecuted the Johannine Jewish Christians during the late first-century. Here is a sample of the type of verbal attack that could have been *transferred to* and *heard by* the Judean religious authorities:

- *You are teachers, yet you do not understand* (3:10)
- *You have never heard God* (5:37)
- *You do not have the love of God* (5:42)
- *You seek your own glory* (5:44a)
- *You do not seek God's glory* (5:44b)
- *Your accuser is Moses* (5:45)
- *You do not believe Moses* (5:46)
- *You do not keep the Torah* (7:19)
- *Your father is the devil* (8:44)
- *You are not from God* (8:47)
- *You are blind and live in darkness* (9:39-41)
- *You are idolaters* (19:15)
- *You sought to kill Jesus* (5:18; 7:1; 8:59; 10:31, 39; 11:8; 18:12)

[1178] Johnson (1987) 419-41

We can imagine the reaction of the Judean authorities, for if there had been reasons for killing Jesus in his time, there were now reasons to kill him again in John's time. The Johannine accusations are hot-tempered, to say the least, but it is obvious from the language that it reflects the concerns and passions of *Jews speaking to other Jews*. Nevertheless, from the perspective of the Judean authorities, such attacks would have been regarded as *blaspheming the leaders and the God of Israel* and the following shows why.

First, in Jewish tradition there is a close relationship between divine and human authority, such that if one is blasphemed the other is also. For example, the Book of the Covenant closely aligns Israel's judges with God, so that cursing civil authorities (assumed to be appointed by God) is to curse God Himself (§ 5.3). We argued that the parallel structure of Exod 22:27 (28)—"You shall *not curse* God and you shall *not blaspheme* the leader of your people"—is an invitation to see God and leaders synoptically; hence, to have contempt for *earthly authority* is to blaspheme *Heaven* (§ 5.3). The link between blaspheming religious authority and showing contempt for God is almost taken for granted by many Biblical and non-biblical texts. For example, Sennacherib's *contempt for God* went hand-in-hand with *derision of Hezekiah* the King (2 Kgs 18—19:37; cf. chapter 8). Stephen is accused of *speaking blasphemous words against Moses and God* (Acts 6:11). Nicanor is described as *mocking and deriding the priests* of the Temple, which is interpreted as blaspheming or speaking wickedly (κακῶς λαλεῖν) (1 Macc 7:36-38). Goliath is portrayed as *defying* (Heb חרף) or *insulting* (LXX ὀνειδίζειν) Israel, which is interpreted as defying or *insulting God* (1 Sam 17:10, 26, 45). Certainly, if the Judean authorities in John's time saw themselves as leaders of Israel and had perceived the Johannine invective toward the Ἰουδαῖοι as directed toward them, then it is hard to imagine that the Judean authorities would not have viewed the Johannine group as blaspheming both them and the God they represented.

Second, as an addendum to the first point, Jewish tradition provides a precedent for accusing and punishing entire groups for blaspheming their leaders. When we traced the discourse concept of blasphemy through Numbers 11-16, we found that *sinning*

with a high hand (blasphemy) was openly and defiantly rebelling against God, which resulted in *kārēt* (*being cut off*) (Num 15:30-31) (§ 7.1 and § 7.3.2). When we traced the key term in LXX (παροξύνω = *to despise* or *blaspheme*), it became clear that the first generation of Israel died in the wilderness because they "threatened to stone Moses and Aaron," which was interpreted as *despising* God (Num 14:11). Israel committed *corporate blasphemy* by mocking, criticizing, and threatening their leaders and so perished in the wilderness. Similarly, Korah lead a rebellion against Moses (Num 16:1-35), which was also interpreted as *despising* or *blaspheming* God (Num 16:1-35) (§ 7.3.3). Korah and his mutineers were described as illegitimately attempting to grasp divine authority and so were cut off. In view of these accounts, it is likely that the Johannine group was viewed as illegitimately grasping for power as well as harshly criticizing the Judean leadership. From the Judean's perspective, the Johannine group would have been blaspheming and deserved *being cut off.*

15.6 Conclusions

We have argued that the characterization (*function*) of the Ἰουδαῖοι in the narrative of FG is complex and multi-layered. The dominant characterization of the Ἰουδαῖοι is negative; they are aligned with the devil, the world, darkness, and judgment. It is likely that the audience of FG would have identified the Ἰουδαῖοι with Judean religious leaders (*referent*), perhaps linked to the Yavnean leaders who recently came from Judea. We suggested that the negative characterization of the Ἰουδαῖοι in FG (function), once projected onto the Judean religious authorities (referent), would have led non-believing Jews to consider the Johannine community as blasphemers of both the legitimate leaders of Israel and God Himself.

CHAPTER 16
CONCLUSIONS

We believe that foregoing study has provided ample evidence to warrant the conclusion that non-believing Jews viewed members of the Johannine community as blasphemous. The evidence and rationale for this judgment has been provided from chapters 5-15 and, as such, the primary task of this thesis, as set forth in chapter 1, has been addressed to our satisfaction (§ 1.6). Since we have provided conclusions at the end of each chapter and summaries along the way, we will not summarize the entire thesis. Here, we will (a) draw together the findings and implications from chapters 13-15 regarding what we identified as *three flashpoints* for the Johannine Jewish community and (b) address the issue of the excommunication.

16.1 Three Flashpoints

In chapters 13-15, we focused on three *points of sensitivity* or *flashpoints* for the Johannine community: the claim that Jesus was equal with God, the affirmation that Jesus was the New Temple, and the allegation that the Ἰουδαῖοι are of the Devil. By points of sensitivity, we mean that these three claims reflected issues that the FG was taking extra effort to communicate, because they either needed clarification or because they needed defending. For each of the three claims, we provided criteria, evidence, and rationale to show that they were points of sensitivity for the author of FG. Because the author took such effort, it is reasonable to infer that these issues were of critical concern to the audience of FG, namely, the Johannine community. It is also reasonable to infer, simply on the basis that FG was considered worthy of copying and passing on to future generations, that the Johannine community latched onto the theology or ideology that Jesus was equal with God, that he was the New Temple, and that the Ἰουδαῖοι were of the Devil. We assumed, therefore, that these beliefs were not merely locked up in a scroll or codex, but were publicly articulated, in one form or another, by the Johannine Jewish group. Based on our findings, we

offer a brief reconstruction of the interplay between the Johannine Jewish believers and their non-believing Jewish counterparts.

First, we assume that the Johannine Jewish Christians publicly or privately voiced—even in and around the synagogue(s), with other Jews to whom they were drawn by kinship or friendship—their belief that Jesus was equal with God. By that they meant that Jesus was God's agent or viceroy, that he had God's authority, and therefore deserved equal honor with God. Of course, such a claim is reminiscent of the braggadocios of infamous blasphemers, such as Antiochus Epiphanes and the 'nameless' Egyptian ruler. For Jews, giving equal honor to Creator and creature alike is blasphemous; it denies God's uniqueness and diminishes His honor. But the Johannine Jewish Christians believed, and told others, that God Himself had sent Jesus into the world and, when Jesus was crucified, it was God that exalted him. The Johannine Jewish believers were quite adamant that Jesus never arrogantly promoted himself; his equality with God was endowed, just as a son shares the honor of his father. In addition, they claimed that Jesus was the eschatological Son of Man, who exercised the two great powers of God, the power to give life and the power to judge humanity. Jesus had power and authority equal with God. For this reason, Jesus could perform healing miracles on the Sabbath and, what is more, the Johannine group themselves, because of their special relationship with Jesus, could also suspend Sabbath laws in order to imitate him. These claims, which would have overwhelmed a non-believing Jew with blasphemies, probably came out in bits and pieces through ordinary conversation. Nonetheless, the cumulative impact of such statements multiplied by the number of believing Jews brave enough to state their claims on behalf of Jesus, would have ultimately raised the ire of the Judean religious authorities, who were apparently in the neighborhood. The claim that Jesus was equal with God, as we have shown, was clearly blasphemous and the Judean authorities, under divine constraint, would have taken stern measures against the blasphemers, as FG bears witness (Jn 9:22; 12:42: 16:1-4).

Second, the Johannine Jewish believers placed an extraordinary emphasis on Jesus as the New Temple. They transferred all of the major symbolism attached to the former

Temple in Jerusalem to Jesus and, not only that, they claimed to participate in the New Temple of Jesus' body. From their perspective, there was no need to rebuild another earthly Temple. God already dwelled among them; indeed, they were the House of God themselves! However, from the perspective of non-believing Jews, the Johannine Jews disparaged the memory and future of a glorious earthly Temple and the God of the Temple. And, even more to the point, when the Johannine Jews transferred all the symbolism of the Temple to Jesus, it is as if they tramped into the Temple, robbed God's House of all its glory, and gave it to a man once crucified as a criminal. They dishonored the Temple and mocked God by giving His honor to a criminal—blasphemy of the highest order! The non-believing Jews also knew stories about Jesus threatening to destroy the Temple and, since threatening the Temple was considered blasphemous, the Johannine Jews shared in the blasphemy of Jesus simply by being the advocates of someone who once threatened the Temple.

Third, the Johannine Jewish Christians became locked in a bitter conflict with the Judean religious leaders or the Ἰουδαῖοι. Each group claimed to be the rightful heirs of Israel's inheritance and each group used every honorable (from their perspective) means necessary to survive the struggle. Both sides apparently used very harsh invectives toward the other group. We can hear some of this in FG itself—*the Ἰουδαῖοι are of the Devil* (8:44), *Jesus is a Samaritan and has a demon* (Jn 8:48), *the Ἰουδαῖοι are idolatrous* (Jn 19:15), and *Jesus is a blasphemer* (10:33). The verbal attacks against the Ἰουδαῖοι in FG were probably voiced against the Judean religious leadership by the Johannine community both in private and in public. From the perspective of non-believing Jews, that was blasphemy; to show contempt for God's chosen leaders was to show contempt for God. Sennacherib's derision and mockery of Hezekiah the King went hand-in-hand with his contempt for God. The type of derision that we hear against the Ἰουδαῖοι in FG was not uncommon among rival Jewish groups in ancient Palestine. Take, for example, the *Rule of the Community*, which curses "all the men of the lot of Belial," who are "traitors," "wicked," and "sons of Belial" (1QS 2.1-25). Similarly, the Johannine group was more than likely accused of blasphemy for despising and rebelling against the Judean authorities. And, like the first generation of Israel who despised and rebelled against

Moses and Aaron, and who was punished with death in the wilderness, so it is likely that the Johannine Jews were perceived to be rebellious and deserved to be cut off.

16.2 Excommunication from the synagogue

The evidence that the Johannine Jewish community was perceived to have blasphemed God, the Temple, and the Judean leadership is on firm ground. The question now before us regards what measures non-believing Jews took, indeed, felt divinely obligated to take when they perceived the Johannine Jewish believers blaspheming.

As we have seen, the penalty for blasphemy was *kārēt*, being *completely cut off* (§ 6.2 and § 7.2). *Kārēt* or extirpation was stipulated for grave offenses against God, including blasphemy. Most texts that deal with *kārēt* do not indicate how the penalty was exacted. Nevertheless, there are indications that there was a curious cooperation between divine and human agents in the enforcement of *kārēt*. Hasel has argued that *kārēt* "expresses the fact that the ultimate punishment is in God's hands; only in certain cases has God designated human agents to carry it out (Lev. 20.2; cf. Ex. 31.14)."[1179] Levine has also drawn a connection between ostracism from the community and being cut off in that "banishment would often have resulted in death."[1180]

Horbury has made a good case that excommunication from the community for grave offenders of the covenant served as a substitute for, or preliminary to, the death penalty.[1181] Although he admits that there is a paucity of evidence, he is able to cite more than a dozen supporting texts. After the exile, exclusion from the community occurred on the basis of various violations of the covenant (Deut 23:1-8). Both Philo (*Spec.* 1.324-45) and Josephus (*Ant.* 4.290-91) interpreted Deut 23:1-8 as warrant for excluding members of the Jewish community on physical and moral grounds. The first biblical case of expulsion of non-compliant Jews is found in Ezra 10:8 (cf. Neh

[1179] Hasel (1995) 348.
[1180] Levine (1989) 242.

13:3 and Isa 56:3). Josephus speaks of apostate Jews who claimed to have been unjustly *expelled* (ἐκβεφλῆσθαι) from Jerusalem (*Ant.* 11.340, 346-7), which is the same verb (ἐκβάλλω) used for Jewish Christians expelled from the synagogue in Jn 9:34-35. Horbury argues that Josephus' account is an instance of substituting expulsion for the death sentence, since apostasy was viewed as an executable offense (*Ant.* 4.309-310; cf. 3 Macc 7:12). In addition, Philo (*Spec.* 1.60) and the *Damascus Document* (CD 12.4-6) also substitute expulsion for execution. Evidence that exclusion from the community was a disciplinary measure is also found in the NT. For example, Lk 6:22 states "blessed are you when people hate you, and when they exclude (ἐκβάλωσιν) you, revile you, and defame you on account of the Son of Man" (NRSV). The term ἐκβάλλω is the same one used for excluding the Johannine Christians from the synagogue in Jn 9:34-35. Horbury mentions several NT texts, of which 1 Cor 5:5 is most important. Here is a reference to the excommunication of a man from the Corinthian community "for the destruction of the flesh," suggesting that excommunication was a form of death or a preliminary to death. Similarly, for FG, there was a close connection between being *expelled from the synagogue* (ἀποσυναγώγους) and *those who kill you* (πᾶς ὁ ἀποκτείνας ὑμᾶς) in Jn 16:2.[1182]

Thus we conclude that the Johannine Jewish Christians were viewed as blasphemous and therefore subject to execution. However, since stoning and other direct measures of execution may not have been possible in the Jewish community to which the Johannine group were affiliated (Jn 18:31), and because excommunication was viewed as a surrogate for execution, it is reasonable to assume that at least some of the Johannine Jewish believers were excommunicated from the synagogue on the grounds of blasphemy. This would provide a plausible alternative to the problematical hypothesis that Johannine Christians were excommunicated on the basis of the *Birkat ha-minim.* In this way, just as Jesus was accused of blasphemy and executed, so also the Johannine community shared in the blasphemy of their master and were executed, as it were, through excommunication.

[1181] Horbury (1998) 43-66.

[1182] Setzer (1994) 93-96 argues that expelling Christians from the shelter of Judaism would have deprived them of the right of assembly and exemption from imperial worship, thus making them vulnerable to accusations of impiety or treason. In this scenario, expulsion from the synagogue 'killed' Jewish Christians by withdrawing the protection of Judaism.

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